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Lundi
8 mai 2017

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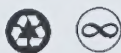
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 8 May 2017

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 8 mai 2017

The House met at 1030.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: I would like to welcome, from my riding of Barrie, the family of Gabriel Kotch, our page captain today. Here with us are his parents, Jeff and Deborah Kotch; his brother, Gil; his sister, Greta; and his grandparents Bev and Tom Widdes. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I have guests of page captain Maddison Rose here today: Maddison's mother, Mandy Knight; her father, Matthew Rose; her stepmother, Tammy Rose; her aunt Meghan Rose; and her uncle Peter Pender. I want to give them a warm welcome to Queen's Park here today.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I'd like to welcome Rhianna Johnson from the great riding of Northumberland—Quinte West—I think.

Hon. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I would like to welcome to Queen's Park today guests from Ovarian Cancer Canada who are joining us for World Ovarian Cancer Day. Here with us is Gabe De Roche. Also here today is Robin Hanson, who is a constituent of mine in Halton. Thank you very much, and welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Laura Albanese: I too would like to welcome a constituent who is here with the group from Ovarian Cancer Canada. Her name is Shannon Corbett. As just mentioned, this is in recognition of World Ovarian Cancer Day. Welcome.

WEARING OF RIBBONS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The government House leader on a point of order.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you, Speaker. I believe you will find that we have unanimous consent that all members be permitted to wear ribbons in recognition of World Ovarian Cancer Day.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The government House leader is seeking unanimous consent to wear the ribbons. Do we agree? Agreed. My understanding is that both lobbies have the ribbons to distribute. Do so as you will.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Last call for introduction of guests? I will call for introduction of

guests. The Minister of Research, Innovation and Science.

Hon. Reza Moridi: It's my great pleasure to welcome Dr. Feng Yuan Bao, who is the founder of a health and wisdom study in China and a leading doctor and researcher in traditional Chinese medicine, accompanied by Dr. Hui Zhao, Dr. Xiang Wu, Dr. Chen Wang and Richard Zhou. Please join me in welcoming them.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Welcome. Further introductions? The member from—no? Okay. Thank you.

We do have guests with us in the Speaker's gallery today. It's a delegation from the State Great Khural, Parliament of Mongolia. Ms. Batsukh Saranchimeg is the member of Parliament leading the delegation. Welcome to our Mongolian friends. Welcome to all of our guests.

ORAL QUESTIONS

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Ms. Sylvia Jones: My question is to the President of the Treasury Board. Friday your government was forced to defend the indefensible: spending almost \$54,000 to purchase luxury Canada Goose jackets for Ministry of Children and Youth Services staff at the same time the ministry is cutting funding to treatment for children with autism. Speaker, does this government still support the purchase of thousand-dollar luxury winter jackets?

Hon. Liz Sandals: Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Michael Coteau: First, I want to talk a little bit about the statement that the member opposite made in regard to autism funding. Number one, the member knows clearly that this is the largest single investment into autism in the history of this country: half a billion dollars. So when she goes around making comments that we've actually made cuts, that's not factual—number one.

Number two, the member opposite knows that we run youth correctional facilities right across this province and we have youth facilities in northern Ontario, and it gets cold up there.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I still care. Finish, please.

Hon. Michael Coteau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, it gets cold in northern Ontario, as the members opposite would understand—

Interjections.

1040

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke is warned.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Nothing is changing.

Time is up. Supplementary.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Back to the President of the Treasury Board, because the minister is just digging himself a bigger hole: Children with autism are looking to your government for help. Children in child protection look to the government to protect them from predators. Some of our province's most vulnerable needed our government to step up, and what did you do instead? They learned that you're buying high-end luxury Canada Goose jackets while they sit on waiting lists.

Speaker, will the President of the Treasury Board put a stop to the purchasing of high-end luxury goods for their staff, yes or no?

Hon. Michael Coteau: As I was saying, in northern Ontario, it sometimes dips below 40 degrees. Mr. Speaker, there are uniforms that are required for our staff in these facilities.

We have a simple procurement process here in the province of Ontario that not only this government has used but other governments have used. What we do, if the members don't know how the process works, is that we put out a request, we ask for supplies, and the quotes come in. We have a process that is arm's length that allows for non-political interference, and we take the best offer made. In this case, it happened to be the best offer made.

These are coats that have a 10-year guarantee. As members and staff work within those facilities, they're transferred from staff to staff. The government of Ontario owns these—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Final supplementary?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: If you're so proud of this purchase, why did it take almost six months and a freedom-of-information request which, by the way, you blocked? If you're so willing to defend this, then why did it take six months?

You were suggesting that the only vendor who had any ability to provide these coats was Canada Goose.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Through the Chair, please.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Through the Speaker—then table the tendering documents and prove to the families in Ontario that the money was well spent, because at this point, nobody believes you, Minister.

Hon. Michael Coteau: Mr. Speaker, first of all, we get the best possible price based on the process we have in place. In this case, these coats were heavily discounted, the coats that we received.

It's interesting that the leadoff question by the Progressive Conservative Party is around coats that are keeping staff warm, while we're focusing on issues—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. Besides the first one, we're very close to warnings.

Finish, please.

Hon. Michael Coteau: Mr. Speaker, we put in place processes in government to ensure that there is no political interference when it comes to purchasing products. This process is a government process that's put in place where bids come in. There was a substantial discount.

The member opposite knows clearly that if you release all the tendering prices in any type of competitive process, then it puts a supplier at a disadvantage in the future. And you claim to be the party that knows business well? If you can't figure out a procurement process, how could you figure out what's best for this province?

ROAD SAFETY

Mr. Michael Harris: My question is to the Minister of Transportation. Last week, this government had an opportunity to make Bill 65 truly about school safety. The Liberals had the opportunity to work with us and protect our children from school bus blow-bys, a vital initiative put forward by my colleague from Chatham–Kent–Essex. They chose instead to say no and to place partisan politics over the safety of our children.

Speaker, will the minister explain why the Liberal government believes the safety of our children on school buses should wait?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I will repeat this morning what I said last week regarding this, both in this chamber and to media outside: We want to make sure at the Ministry of Transportation, as we move forward and continue to bring in enhancements or improvements to help all users of our roads, including our most vulnerable, including students themselves, that fundamentally, particularly as it relates to technology, we're going to find a way to get it right.

But again, what I said last week in this chamber in response to Bill 65 is that that member and the Conservative caucus know that they've had multiple opportunities at committee and, frankly, during debate here at first and second readings, to be supportive, generally speaking, of the thrust of Bill 65. Repeatedly, both here in the chamber and at committee, Speaker, they have chosen instead to use administrative techniques to filibuster the legislation and to delay its implementation. That's unfortunate, but I certainly look forward to the follow-up and the third question here this morning.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Harris: This is so disappointing: disappointing to students, disappointing to parents, disappointing for Ontario. Instead of choosing to take action against school bus blow-bys, this Liberal government chose partisan roadblocks and delay and the typical Liberal call for study and review. Speaker, every day there are more than two blow-bys per bus in Mississauga alone.

Will the minister tell us why this isn't a priority for his government?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: That member knows full well that currently there is nothing in any law that prevents the use of this particular technology on a school bus. In fact, there are multiple municipalities that have spoken to us about launching pilots, and I believe some have, Speaker. But again, fundamentally what this is, and we saw this start last week with this member and his leader, Patrick Brown, is a tactical manoeuvre—sorry.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm just going to ask you to refer to the Leader of the Opposition—title or riding, please.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Thanks very much, Speaker. As I was saying, this member and his leader, Mr. Brown—at the end of the day, this is a tactical manoeuvre because they are embarrassed, and rightly so. Fundamentally, at committee last week we saw that this particular member and the Conservative caucus introduced hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of administrative amendments to the legislation designed specifically to block its passage. They're trying to make themselves look good, Speaker. It's not going to work.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

Mr. Michael Harris: His answer was fake news, Speaker. While last week's opportunity has passed, we're going to give the minister and his Liberal members one more chance to do what's best for students' school bus safety today. Our leader, Patrick Brown, wrote all three House leaders today, reaffirming that there is no monopoly on a good idea, and with that, we want to acknowledge the NDP for supporting us on this important safety initiative.

Will the minister direct his Liberal members to right this wrong at committee today and vote to protect our children from school bus blow-bys today?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: As I have said repeatedly, the safety of schoolchildren, the safety of all of our vulnerable road users, is a top priority for the ministry. In fact, that's why we introduced Bill 65, and literally at every turn, in debate and at committee, that member and his leader, Mr. Brown, the leader of the official opposition, have repeatedly sought ways to actually slow down the passage of the legislation. They realized that it would be an embarrassing situation for them for this to become public, as it did last week: that they literally had 300-plus amendments—only one of which dealt with this specific issue, but literally over 300, street by street by street, including Avenue Road just outside of Allenby public school, where representatives from that school came to committee to let that member and his leader know that it was important to move forward with Bill 65.

It was reprehensible behaviour, Speaker. The public is not fooled. We'll continue to get the job done right, but they should help us pass Bill 65.

ENERGY POLICIES

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is to the Acting Premier. It has been 68 days since the Liberals an-

nounced they would refinance an increasingly privatized hydro system, adding billions of dollars in new debts for customers and leaving fat profits for already profitable multinational energy companies.

1050

New Democrats said it then and we'll say it now: The government can't expect to table legislation that will make massive changes to the hydro system that are bad for people and businesses and expect to ram it through this Legislature with little or no opportunity for public input.

With just 12 sitting days left, why haven't we seen a bill?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I will pass the supplementary on to the Minister of Energy, but I do want to take this opportunity to acknowledge that, on Friday, the Speaker announced he will not be seeking re-election in 2018. I want to just say to you, Speaker, thank you for the work you have done in this Legislature and in your community. You've been a real inspiration for all of us.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'll still give warnings.

Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Again to the Acting Premier: "People deserve to see it in black and white so they can debate it.... Don't hide the details. Don't delay. Don't come to the Legislature just before it rises this summer with a last-minute bill, ultimatums and no time for committees, experts and the people of Ontario to take the time they need to examine the bill." That was NDP leader Andrea Horwath almost two months ago.

There is still no plan, no legislation, and the House is scheduled to rise in 12 sitting days. This is exactly what we warned about. Is the government going to try to ram through a hydro bill and shut out the public with no time to hear from the people of Ontario?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I'm pleased to rise and talk about the fair hydro plan that we've been talking about for the last two months and letting people know that they're going to be saving up to, on average, 25% on their bills; some will be higher, especially for those who live in the rural or remote parts of our province, northern Ontario. They can see up to 40% and 50% coming off their bills.

The OEB, the Ontario Energy Board, in anticipation of us bringing forward this legislation, brought forward on May 1 an additional 9% reduction, meaning we're seeing a 17% reduction on our bills compared to last year right now. I know that's hard for the opposition to understand, because one of them has no plan and the other plan that they have doesn't make sense. This is something that's acting and working.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: The Liberal plan will add \$40 billion in debt. It will double down on private contracts. This is a big deal. Ontarians want their voices to be

heard. This bill should be debated. It should have committee hearings. The committee should travel and the people should get their say.

Is the government getting ready to ram through their hydro bill without real debate, real examination and real public input?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Let's talk about real. A 25% reduction is real relief for families across the province. A 40% to 50% reduction on rural or remote rate protection plans—that's real relief coming to families in the rural parts of our province. And 500,000 businesses—that's 500,000 real, small businesses and farms—will also see the 25% reduction.

But let's talk about unreal, not realistic. That's their plan, which they don't even talk about anymore. They forgot that they brought forward a plan, probably because it's not a plan that will bring any real relief to families across this province. Our Ontario fair hydro plan will bring real relief for families.

PHARMACARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: My question is to the Acting Premier. I would like to start by wishing all of the nurses out there a happy Nursing Week.

My question is quite simple: Does the Premier believe that our hospitals should only be available to people under the age of 25 and over the age of 65?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I also want to recognize and congratulate and appreciate all of the well over 100,000 nurses who work throughout our health care system, in our hospitals, in our long-term-care homes, in homes, in community organizations, throughout the public health system and in our 25 nurse practitioner-led clinics. They are the bedrock of our health care system, and I'm so appreciative of the hard work that they do every day.

When it comes to the issue, I think the member opposite is alluding to our proposal that four million children and youth up to their 25th birthday will receive access absolutely free of charge to more than 4,000 medications—the entire drug formulary of this province. If that's what she's referring to, then yes, in fact, it will be implemented January 1, 2018.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: The seventh Ontario drug plan, I would say hastily outlined in the budget, leaves working people unable to afford the medications they need. We don't leave working people out of our hospitals. We don't leave working people out of getting an MRI. We don't leave working people out of getting surgery. We don't leave working people out of seeing a family physician. Why won't the Premier bring in a universal pharmacare program?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Our pharmacare plan will cover roughly 30 times as many medicines as their proposal, or 4,275 more medicines to their 125.

Steve Morgan, who stood up with the leader of the third party when she made her proposal, had this to say in a TVO article last week: "I'm sure when we write the histories of pharmacare in Canada this"—our proposal, he was referring to—"will be seen as the time when a clear principle was laid down by a provincial government." I'm proud of the courage and the leadership that this Premier has demonstrated to deliver the beginnings—an important—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): You'll have a wrap-up.

I want to remind members that if you move from one seat to another, it doesn't change the fact that you're not supposed to heckle. Just to let you know.

You have one wrap-up sentence.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Natalie Mehra of the Ontario Health Coalition—they know well—said, "This is an amazing announcement that will provide national leadership.... This is a great first step in the right direction." I agree with her, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Well, the minister would know that essential medicines are just that: They are the medications that are essential. We have a plan, supported by the World Health Organization, that ensures that every single Ontarian has access to essential medicine, no matter how old you are, no matter where you live and no matter how much money you make.

Why is the minister and why is the Premier refusing to support universal drug coverage for all Ontarians?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I was at SickKids with the member from Trinity-Spadina on Friday making an announcement of an additional \$500 million for operating costs to hospitals.

We had a chance to talk about pharmacare, and there was a pediatric oncologist, a child's cancer doctor, who spoke of just how critically important this pharmacare program is. He talked about their inability to discharge patients home because they knew they couldn't afford the cancer medications for their child. He had a phone call from a parent who said, "This is remarkable news." They were going out—the husband and wife, as a result of this decision, were going to plan a dinner together, the two of them, to celebrate how many thousands of dollars this will save them.

1100

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Good morning, Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Finance. All last week, we asked this government what they knew about troubled mortgage lender Home Capital. We asked what the government's involvement was, what their intentions were, and, quite frankly, who was asleep at the switch. The government provided no answers, choosing instead to ramble on all about the federal regulator.

Well, it seems the government did know more than they admitted. In fact, they have inserted one of their own, Alan Hibben, into Home Capital. Last week, we asked the government if Home Capital passed the smell test. What's the Liberal solution? Put another Liberal insider in there and stir the pot. I ask the minister, does this pass his party's standards for accountability and ethics?

Hon. Charles Sousa: I find the line of questioning rather insulting given the fact that we have taken great pains to be transparent. These are operations and activities of independent agencies of government. They are not reporting to the government in any way possible.

Mr. Hibben, to his credit, has sought advice from the Integrity Commissioner on a conflict of interest to ensure that he acts appropriately, given the fact he did advise our government in other matters. It's appropriate that this individual took that step. Furthermore, he's a man of great integrity and excellent credentials. I can appreciate now why an independent, private organization is seeking his input as well.

It is not a decision made by government, and the member opposite knows that full well. I frankly suggest, again, that he's being totally inappropriate in his questioning.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Back to the minister—who I also think is very inappropriate in his answers, Speaker, because we're not getting any answers. We've got a very troubling situation in Ontario, with Home Capital under siege. While the government denied any connection last week, we now learn that they've placed their own Liberal insider into this deal. Alan Hibben, a key player in the Premier's Hydro One sell-off scheme, has been put on Home Capital's board. He is also one of the Premier's five appointees on OPTrust, which is the Ontario public service employee pension plan.

With this insider now in there, does the government plan on joining this game of "I'll scratch your back if you scratch mine"? Why is the Premier's inside guy now inside Home Capital?

Hon. Charles Sousa: It's very troubling indeed that this individual, this member from the Progressive Conservative Party, suggests that the government should intervene in the practices of private businesses. The member opposite believes that private businesses should prevail and government should not interfere. That's exactly what's happening.

But we are protecting the interests of investors and consumers. That is why the role of FSCO—the financial regulatory authority of Ontario—has intervened and provided enforcement. That is why the Ontario Securities Commission has acted accordingly. It's also why OSFI, which is regulating this federally run company, is involved.

The member opposite is making accusations, and he's also presuming some form of conflict. Alan Hibben has taken the appropriate steps to ensure that he's not doing so.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms. Jennifer K. French: My question is to the Acting Premier. Steve Borders is a constituent of mine in Oshawa, and he is a victim of the damage this Liberal government has done to our health care system. Steve tore his rotator cuff in December 2016 and has been waiting for care ever since. He waited for an MRI, he waited to see a specialist, and he's still waiting, five months later, to even confirm a date for his shoulder surgery. Steve has spent the past five months in relentless pain, unable to work and wondering when our health care system will be there to help him. Steve wrecked his shoulder five months ago and still doesn't even have a date for surgery.

Is the Premier okay with this being the reality of our health care system in Ontario?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Well, Mr. Speaker, regrettably, real-life stories like this do occur. But it certainly isn't the case in the province, where, whether it's for access to MRIs or ultrasounds, we are at the top or near the top in the country; or access from a family doctor to a specialist, where we are leading the country; or access from the specialist to the procedure that may or may not be required, we are leading the country again. The wait times in this province are the best or near the very best of all the provinces and territories across Canada.

But, Mr. Speaker, it's these particular instances which drive us, despite being the best or near the best in the country—it inspires us to continue making the right investments, and I'm happy to speak to those in the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: To talk about the "best" wait times—I'm sure that Steve would have different words to describe those wait times.

But back to the Acting Premier: Hospitals are at capacity. Patients are being treated in hallways. Wait times are out of control. Our health care system is, frankly, in shambles, and the Premier is offering us a Band-Aid. I'll tell you, Speaker, Band-Aids won't fix Steve's shoulder.

Steve's wife, Donna, told me, "Steve has not been able to pick up his granddaughter and play with her, which is he all he wishes to do.... He has been unable to do his everyday stuff like shovel the driveway and sidewalk, put deodorant on, or pull a T-shirt over his head." This shouldn't be possible in Ontario, but it is happening all over the province. What do you have to say to Steve and anyone else in Ontario whose health care system has stopped supporting them?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I'm proud—which will be relevant to the member's own riding—that we increased the operating budget, the base budget, of Lakeridge Health by almost \$7 million this year. We are, as per my announcement that I made on Friday, investing more than half a billion dollars in our hospitals.

We're also investing, over the next three years, importantly—which speaks to this question—\$1.3 billion

specifically aimed to further reduce those wait times. Those wait times, as I referenced, are the best in the country already. That doesn't mean that they shouldn't be even shorter, but that's why we're making these kinds of investments, including \$1.3 billion over the next three years specifically for wait times.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

M^{me} Nathalie Des Rosiers: Ma question est pour le ministre du Développement économique et de la Croissance.

Minister, last week this government took a great step and announced a balanced budget for 2017. My riding of Ottawa–Vanier will benefit a lot from our investment in universal pharmacare for youth under 25 and the investment in our health care and hospitals.

This budget was good news, but what are the additional benefits for Ontarians and for our economy? Minister, could you please enlighten this House about the state of our economy and what is going on with the balanced budget?

Hon. Brad Duguid: There's no question that eliminating the deficit is going to help our economy, and there's no question that our strong economy made it possible for us to eliminate the deficit. We've created close to 700,000 net new jobs since the recession. That's 100,000 jobs in the last few months alone. We led the country in growth. In fact, we've been leading the entire G7 in growth over the last three years.

Last week, our unemployment rate reached a 16-year low. We have not had a lower unemployment rate since 2001. To put that in perspective, we haven't had a lower unemployment rate since Austin Matthews was in junior kindergarten; Tiger Woods was a good golfer; Wikipedia and iTunes were something that was just coming online; Mr. Speaker, you were in year two of an illustrious 18-year career here at Queen's Park—congratulations; and the member for Niagara West, I believe, was just turning three years old.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

M^{me} Nathalie Des Rosiers: Merci, monsieur le Ministre. Thank you a lot for your great leadership in protecting jobs in Ontario. It's great to hear that we've been creating all the necessary jobs for our economy to thrive, but the world is changing and so is our economy.

The region of Ottawa is part of this change. We're making huge strides in the digital economy, including 5G networks, cyber security and e-commerce, where we have companies like Shopify that are doing so well.

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Today I think it's crucially important that we take steps to lead the economy of the future. Many people are feeling a bit anxious about what this means for them. They certainly want a digital transformation, they know it's happening on a global scale, but they want to know how Ontario is preparing for this. Minister, can you please tell us what the government is doing to ensure that we remain competitive?

Hon. Brad Duguid: While it's nice to have the lowest unemployment rate in 16 years, and while it's nice to see the job growth happening in our economy, just because we're doing well today is no guarantee, in this fast-changing competitive global economy, that we're going to be doing well tomorrow.

That's why I'm really proud that we're making significant investments in our Business Growth Initiative. We're investing \$50 million in the Vector Institute for Artificial Intelligence; \$130 million is going toward 5G next-generation technologies, much of it in the member's area of Ottawa; and \$80 million is going toward the autonomous vehicle innovation network, again much of it coming in Ottawa. Another \$75 million will be going toward our initiative to advance supercomputing in this province in such areas as genomics and neuroscience, and \$20 million for quantum computing.

The fact is that making Ontario a leader in today's economy requires these investments. We're very proud that we're building that economy for the next generation.

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. Norm Miller: My question is to the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. Minister, Great Lakes Graphite in Matheson has announced it is moving to Pennsylvania. Speaker, can the minister tell us why the company feels that it is better to do business in Pennsylvania than in Ontario?

Hon. Bill Mauro: Thank you to the member for the question. I'm not familiar with the decision by the company. I don't believe our ministry has been contacted by the particular company and given any reasons for their move. It could be in a variety of areas; I don't know.

What I can tell you, Speaker, is that for a very long time we have put programs in place that I would suggest are very supportive of the mining sector in the province of Ontario. The most obvious example would be the New Gold mine that just opened four hours west of my home community of Thunder Bay. There are obviously policies, programs and support mechanisms in place that are incenting mining investment in exploration and extraction, or else a company as large as New Gold would not have just recently opened their mine, with 650 or so people on a construction site and about 450 who will be in place when the mine is open and operating.

Clearly something is going on. Perhaps the member will, in his supplementary, explain some of the detail about why this particular company decided to move.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm surprised by the minister's response to that question. Just last July, the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund announced an investment of \$412,000 in Great Lakes Graphite of Matheson, so this announced move to leave town comes less than 10 months after the government gave this company \$400,000.

Speaker, did the government not attach any requirements to the funding that the company remain in Ontario

for a number of years? Why was this company able to accept \$400,000 of taxpayers' money and then leave town?

Hon. Bill Mauro: Speaker, I'm happy to circle back on the NOHFC piece and find out if there were any terms or conditions attached to the grant that was provided—grant and/or loan; I'm not sure which, or both. Sometimes, through NOHFC it's a combination of both. I'm happy to circle back and find out what the terms and/or conditions may have been associated with that loan.

I would go back to simply make the point that in Ontario the mining sector is doing well. In fact, as I've had the opportunity to say in this Legislature on more than a couple of occasions, investment in exploration activity in the province right now has seen an increase last year, saw an increase this year and, by the end of the year, is expected to reach a very robust number.

In fact, the mining sector is strong in the province. We're doing well. Investment is here. In fact, on exploration alone, Ontario represents 25% of total exploration activity in the entire country. So something is going well. People are investing in the province, and we look forward to more positive announcements in the weeks and months ahead.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Catherine Fife: My question is to the Acting Premier. My office has been working with Jim Brown and his family since March to reunite him with his wife. They were separated when Colleen Brown was admitted to Sunnyside long-term care in February due to an Alzheimer's diagnosis. Jim remains on a waiting list, separated from his partner of 40 years.

The waiting list for long-term-care beds in Waterloo region alone is 2,600 people. In order to get on the crisis list, Jim and his family have been told that they have to apply to many care facilities. If Jim was placed in a different home, it might take even longer to reunite the couple.

Speaker, the family says that "to live with your loved one is to live with dignity." Why doesn't this government believe that seniors in Ontario should be able to live in dignity?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I'd be happy to speak with the member opposite about this specific individual—this couple—because I think if she were to look behind her and to the left, there's an example in her caucus of a very collaborative relationship, where a couple was faced with a similar challenge of reunification with regard to long-term-care homes, and we were successful in resolving that.

It is regrettable and unfortunate and often unnecessary that the couple should be split up when one of them requires long-term care, and there's an effort being made to reunify. I'd be happy to work with the member opposite to resolve this, as I have on several other occasions.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I think a minister just said that I have to bring a question to the Legislature in order to ensure that senior couples can actually spend time in a long-term-care facility—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Finish, please.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Jim's family have tried contacting the Minister of Health, but they haven't received a response. The CCAC response was downright confusing.

Over the last 14 years of this Liberal government, the waiting list for long-term beds in Ontario has grown to 25,000 people—and nothing in your budget will get those people into the care that they need.

Today, Jim is on a crisis waiting list in the Waterloo-Wellington region, but he and Colleen remain separated and their family remains worried. They describe the situation as cruel.

Can the Premier explain why this Liberal government doesn't have a plan to ensure that Ontario seniors get the long-term care that they need and that they deserve?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Just to clarify: I wasn't suggesting that the member opposite, to get action, needed to come to this Legislature and talk about a situation. In fact, it was her decision to avoid speaking with me and to bring it here to the Legislature and politicize it.

Many other people in this Legislature—probably the majority—know that I work extremely hard in a collaborative way, with no partisanship involved, to try to solve problems. In this case, I want to try to solve this problem. But if she chooses to come here and make it political, that's her decision. But it doesn't detract from my efforts to try to resolve it.

By the way, in the long-term-care budget in the budget that was delivered two weeks ago—we're increasing the long-term-care budget by 2% for the investment in that. We've created more than 10,000 more beds since coming into office, and we're redeveloping 30,000.

I'm happy to work with her, whether she wants to work with me or not.

INDIGENOUS EDUCATION

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: My question is to the Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation. Our government is committed to improving the quality of life, developing partnerships and expanding opportunities in indigenous communities. That's why we continue to work with the indigenous leadership in a spirit of collaboration and mutual respect to create prosperous, healthy and strong communities.

Ontario's balanced 2017 budget is a reflection of this commitment. We want to improve outcomes by achieving real progress in developing strategic, integrated investments and initiatives across government for the First Nations, Métis, Inuit and urban indigenous peoples.

Can the minister please elaborate how the provincial 2017 budget supports indigenous communities in Ontario?

Hon. David Zimmer: We remain committed to a strong relationship with indigenous communities in Ontario, and this is supported by the strategic funding we make as a government.

In the budget announcement last week, we announced that we are enhancing indigenous education in Ontario. Specifically, we plan to spend over \$200 million over three years for more First Nation, Métis and Inuit learners to access high-quality post-secondary education and training opportunities.

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Speaker, the indigenous community knows that education often guarantees the future. This government is committed to improving indigenous education in the province and to closing the achievement gap between indigenous and non-indigenous students. That's why we will continue to invest in indigenous higher education and learning opportunities.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: I'm glad to hear that our government is investing in indigenous students and their futures. Through working in partnership, we can see that real progress is beginning to happen.

Although there is much work left to do, I'm encouraged to know that this government is taking the necessary steps to close the achievement gap. This is an accordance with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls to action in regard to indigenous education.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister please elaborate on the details of how and where this funding will be used?

Hon. David Zimmer: Speaker, specifically \$26 million of this funding will be to enhance the capacity and sustainability of Ontario's nine publicly funded aboriginal institutes. For instance, the aboriginal institute at Six Nations, Six Nations Polytechnic, has its own programs, but it also has bridging programs that enable the students to move from the polytechnic to community colleges and to universities.

We will remain committed until the education achievement gap between indigenous and non-indigenous students is no longer a reality. From the Weeneebayko health authority to Fort William First Nation, to Sudbury, to Sioux Lookout, Thunder Bay and North Bay, we remain committed to funding to help indigenous communities in the educational opportunities in Ontario.

This budget goes beyond education to invest in the health and well-being of Ontarians. It is proving an excellent opportunity.

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Mr. Jim McDonell: To the Minister of Education: I want to thank the minister for coming out to Merrickville with her educational review panel on Friday night, but participants from my riding left disappointed, with their warden stating it was simply too little, too late.

Here is just one of the quotes from a student who was affected by the closure. "I will now have to go to a school where I know nobody and have to travel an extra 30 minutes by bus. I will lose most of my friends due to them changing school boards and I will lose the great connections I had with my teachers."

Speaker, in Alexandria we have five schools, all less than 50% capacity. Elementary and kindergarten students in my riding will spend over an hour on the bus and drive by all those five schools to get to theirs, another 20 minutes away. Is the answer to close them all and bus all the students out of the community, or is it to impose a moratorium on school closures until a full, comprehensive study on education is complete?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I want to thank the member opposite for the question and I want to thank all of those who came out to the first set of consultations that were held on Friday. This is an engagement process that is designed so that we can listen to rural and remote Ontario. The question we're asking is: How do we support our students and make education even better?

This is not about a moratorium. We know that school boards have the opportunity, that they can make decisions at the local level in the best interest of their students. If they feel that they need to take a pause on a particular project, they can do that. That's exactly what happened in Markdale, where they brought the community together to talk about how to design a community hub. They're having those conversations. There's nothing stopping school boards and their communities from doing that.

What this engagement process is about is, how do we improve education outcomes for students in rural Ontario? We heard some fantastic ideas, Mr. Speaker, and we're going to continue with these consultations.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary? The member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound.

Mr. Bill Walker: Mr. Speaker, my question is also to the education minister. Two reports, from People for Education and the Ontario Alliance Against School Closures, show your government is hollowing out schools across rural Ontario, like Chesley District Community School, which has rock-solid academic showings and strong roots in the community.

It's sad how you have no money to keep schools open, but were quick to find money to cancel two gas plants for \$1.1 billion and waste \$8 billion on eHealth consultants with nothing to show for it.

Minister, you and the Premier told Ontarians in no uncertain terms to trust you with their education and their schools. But after they put your party back in power, you and your Premier turned your back on them, presiding over the largest wave of school closings in Ontario's history. Ontarians have never felt more cheated. On their behalf, I ask you, Minister: Are you and your Premier ideologues or are you actually ready to change your mind about an issue when it's the right thing to do, which is to stop school closures across rural Ontario?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Mr. Speaker, in the member's own riding, there is a good example of a school board

that has taken a pause, Markdale, and is working with the local community to design a community hub. I'm sure he wants that initiative to go forward.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, the member from Elgin–Middlesex–London, and the member from Niagara West–Glanbrook will come to order.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: We understand that these are difficult decisions. I have spoken to students at Chesley because their school is moving the high school students out to three available high schools that are within 15 minutes around that local school and turning that particular school into a K-to-8 school for elementary students. These are the local decisions that boards have to make. They are doing them very mindfully of the outcomes that are beneficial for—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

STUDENT ASSISTANCE

Ms. Peggy Sattler: My question is to the Acting Premier. Maria van Burgsteden and her daughter Julia live in London. They are excited that Julia, a straight-A student, will be starting university in the fall. But they are also worried about the almost \$9,000 in fees and tuition that Julia will have to pay.

Like many Ontarians, Maria is a single mother who works contract to contract, with an annual average income of less than \$45,000. This past year, Maria secured a contract that offered pay in lieu of benefits, pushing her income to just over \$50,000. When Maria and Julia applied for the Liberal version of free tuition, they were shocked to learn that Julia was only eligible for a \$3,000 grant; in other words, \$6,000 less than Julia's actual tuition costs.

Speaker, can the Acting Premier explain why her Liberal government is telling Maria and Julia and other Ontarians that tuition is free when in fact it is anything but?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I'm very grateful for this question. I can't speak to that particular case, but would be very happy to look into it. What I can tell you, though, is that over 200,000 students will be receiving grants that are greater than their tuition. Any way you look at it, Speaker, that is free tuition.

I urge people to look at the calculator online. We've made it very easy for people to estimate how much they will be able to get at ontario.ca/osap. You answer a few questions and you learn how much aid there is to get. I look forward to the supplementary because this is a very progressive, transformative initiative and people need to know about it.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Speaker, young people like Julia shouldn't have to take on a huge debt in order to get an education and build their future. Even though Julia will be living at home while she is at university, money is

tight, making it difficult to cover tuition, mandatory student fees and textbooks. OSAP has offered a \$9,000 loan, but Julia is worried about having to repay a debt that could amount to \$36,000 after four years. Does the Premier think it is okay to saddle young people like Julia with such massive student loans?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Let me repeat: People can go online. Students in grade 7, grade 8, and grade 12 can go online and see how much aid there is available. I'm not sure what the NDP policy is, Speaker, but I can tell you what ours is. Ours is that we have removed financial barriers for students across this province. It doesn't matter how old you are, it doesn't matter how many years out of high school you've been; we are there to help.

The new deal for students is you do the work, you get the marks, you get accepted and we will make sure that finances never stand in the way of your success.

ACCESSIBILITY FOR THE DISABLED

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Speaker, my question is for the minister responsible for accessibility. Minister, during our constituency week a couple of weeks ago, I met with a few groups that shared with me some of the challenges and barriers people with disabilities in my communities are facing.

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Despite being willing and able to work, people with disabilities continue to face multiple barriers to employment. The employment rate for people with disabilities is less than 50%, and a quarter of those employed feel they are working in a role that does not reflect the breadth of their qualifications.

By removing barriers in Ontario, we foster a culture of inclusion, increasing participation in our communities and workforce and creating a society where everyone has the opportunity to reach their full potential. Speaker, could the minister explain what our government is doing to remove barriers to employment for people with disabilities?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I thank the member from Northumberland–Quinte West for this very important question on accessibility and employment in Ontario.

We know that improving employment opportunities and outcomes for people with disabilities will help build Ontario up for everyone, and we remain committed to our goal of making Ontario accessible by 2025. That's why we created the AODA employment standard. I was actually on that standard committee years before I became a politician. It's a very important standard to help organizations meet their obligations and to proactively remove barriers.

We recognize, Speaker, that achieving accessibility means taking very concrete steps to support the full participation of persons with disabilities. That's why, in last year's budget, in addition to the standard, our government made a commitment to create an employment strategy for people with disabilities. I'm happy to talk about that more in the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I want to thank the minister for her incredible work towards making an accessible Ontario. People of all abilities deserve to reach their social and economic potential by contributing their diverse skills and talents in the workplace. Unfortunately, many Ontario employers are reluctant to hire people with disabilities, and yet nearly a third of Ontario's small and medium-sized businesses report having difficulty filling job vacancies.

Despite this, studies show that workers with disabilities are more loyal, have better attendance and perform better than average on the job. As well, most workers with disabilities only require minor accommodations to work. A more diverse workforce, including people with disabilities, will help Ontario businesses increase their productivity, innovation and exports, making them more competitive.

Minister, what steps is your ministry taking to shift attitudes about accessibility and increase the participation of persons with disabilities?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: The employment standard provides a baseline of accessibility and employment practices right from recruitment, getting that first step in the door, through career development. But we know there's more to do.

Our employment strategy will establish a cohesive made-in-Ontario vision to ensure Ontarians have access to a continuum of employment and transition and training services. It will streamline employment services to recognize the unique needs and employment goals of each individual—we're working very closely with a number of partner ministries on this—and it will engage employers to be active partners in breaking down barriers and promoting an inclusive workforce by shifting attitudes and dispelling misconceptions.

I am very proud of the work that we are doing on accessibility, and I'll continue to seek ways to break down barriers to make Ontario accessible by 2025.

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Mr. Steve Clark: My question is for the Minister of Education. I want to thank the minister for coming to Merrickville in Leeds–Grenville on Friday.

Parents, municipal leaders in my riding and the member for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry told her clearly why the school closure process they've just gone through is a disgrace. But they want to fix it. They have one request, that all the school closures be put on hold until an all-party review develops a new process. One parent stated that the only way we can have faith the minister is listening is if she agrees to a moratorium.

Speaker, will the minister put a moratorium in place that includes schools under the threat of closure? Yes or no?

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Infrastructure, come to order, please.

Minister of Education.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I, too, want to thank the member opposite for the question and also for attending the consultation that was held in Merrickville on Friday evening.

The consultations and engagement processes that have begun in rural Ontario and remote communities in Ontario are designed to ask the question: How do we improve education for rural and remote communities? Are there creative ideas and solutions that we need to consider to make those types of enhancements? That's exactly the conversation that we're engaged in.

It does not mean that we can't move forward with decisions that school boards are making locally, because they are doing that with the framework that they want to ensure the best outcomes for students in their communities. That is happening. We know that those are very difficult conversations and difficult decisions, but they're all being made with the view to improving education outcomes for students in rural communities.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Steve Clark: Back to the minister: Unfortunately, what we just heard sounded a lot like the minister's words on Friday night. She said a lot but ignored the real issue that matters: the 12 Upper Canada schools that this government wants to close starting next month. For these schools and these communities, there is no tomorrow. As one parent told the minister, "We can't do better next time; we have to do better now."

Doing better means giving these schools and communities a second chance to show why rural and small schools matter. Again, parents and municipal leaders deserve an honest yes-or-no answer to the question that they asked repeatedly on Friday night: Will the minister agree to a moratorium, and will she do it today?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Of course our schools matter, and every student deserves the best education possible in Ontario. That's why we're engaged in these conversations so we can talk about the creative solutions that can improve education for rural and remote communities. For instance, having the opportunity for two school boards to come together and to talk about joint use: We're seeing where that's creating enormous benefits, improving facilities, broadening the programming options for students, and having more extracurricular activities.

It is this coming together and the utilization of shared space that has that possibility for better programming. We're seeing that right across, as boards come together, as communities and boards come together, and ensuring that the conversation that we're having is one about the best possible outcomes for students. I would absolutely encourage that member opposite to continue to have that dialogue with local school board trustees because that's the question we're focused on here on this side of the House.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mr. Percy Hatfield: My question is to the Deputy Premier. About 400 homes for low- to moderate-income

families will close this year because Toronto Community Housing doesn't have enough money to fix them. About 1,000 homes will have to be closed by next year. The city of Toronto has a plan to save these homes, and the money to pay a third of the cost. Ottawa will put up another third. Toronto's mayor has asked the Premier to pay the remaining third but the Premier said no. Why won't the Wynne Liberals give the city of Toronto what it needs to help save these homes?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the Minister of Housing.

Hon. Chris Ballard: I just want to go on the record and say that over the next three years, Ontario will be investing \$2 billion in affordable and sustainable housing across Ontario—\$2 billion. Having the federal government at the table is very important—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Finish, please.

Hon. Chris Ballard: Having the federal government at the table is very important. We certainly welcome their commitment of \$11 billion over 11 years divided among the 13 provinces and territories. Our government has increased funding year over year, showing our commitment to building a fair society where everyone benefits.

In the supplementary, I'll be delighted to talk about that more.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Social housing used to be a provincial responsibility. Mike Harris and the Conservatives downloaded it onto the municipal tax base. The Liberals have been in power for 14 years. In 2013, the Premier cut \$129 million in annual funding to Toronto's social housing program.

It's cheaper to repair existing homes than build new ones. That's why we in the NDP have pledged to pay the one third provincial share when we form government. Why won't the Liberals undo the damage that their cuts to social housing have done to Toronto's struggling families?

Hon. Chris Ballard: I'm very happy to highlight all of the amazing funding that this province has put into Toronto. I can tell you that we've made these investments: \$340 million into Toronto for homelessness prevention to help Toronto's most vulnerable residents; \$130 million to expand affordable housing so that every Ontarian has an affordable place to call home; and, as announced in the budget, provincial land in Toronto alone worth up to \$100 million to build new affordable rental units. The list goes on.

This year alone, Ontario contributed \$43 million to the city of Toronto for repairs and retrofits to social housing. That expansion included an increase in funding for Toronto, reaching over \$117 million annual by 2019. As I said at the beginning—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member from Dufferin—Caledon

has given notice of her dissatisfaction with the answer to her question given by the Minister of Children and Youth Services concerning purchase of coats for staff. This matter will be debated on Tuesday at 6 p.m.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry on a point of order.

Mr. Jim McDonell: I know that the member from Elgin—Middlesex—London must not have noticed, but his wife, Jenn, is here in the gallery.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation.

Hon. David Zimmer: On a point of order, Speaker: I'd like to correct my record. In my answer on the supplementary question, I said that \$26 million was being invested in nine aboriginal institutes. I misspoke. The correct amount is \$56 million.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I want to offer the member from Elgin—Middlesex—London good luck this afternoon. That's all I have to say.

There are no deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 1 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1142 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: I would like to welcome representatives of Ovarian Cancer Canada, here with us today in recognition of World Ovarian Cancer Day. We are joined by survivors Robin Hanson, Rhianna Johnson, Donna Pepin, Shannon Corbett and Heather Heaps, and OCC staff members Cailey Crawford, Kelly Grover and Vanessa Low.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Welcome.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

WORLD OVARIAN CANCER DAY

Mr. Michael Harris: Today marks World Ovarian Cancer Day—a day recognized here and across the planet to acknowledge the impacts of, and educate communities about, ovarian cancer and its symptoms.

Just last month in my riding, I met with Adele and Linda, residents who shared the impact this disease has had on their lives and the lives of their families. I was moved by their passion to raise awareness about ovarian cancer and advocacy for the urgent need for improved treatment—a passion that I'm certain is shared by the many volunteers and staff of Ovarian Cancer Canada that we have in attendance today. I welcome you.

Every day, five women die from ovarian cancer, making it the most fatal women's cancer in Canada. For

far too long, sufferers have felt overlooked as they are told that better treatment options simply aren't available.

This disease touches all of our communities, and we all have women in our lives who are at risk of this terrible illness, of course.

Ovarian Cancer Canada has launched a campaign to recognize the need for action on ovarian cancer, for the women living with the disease and for those at risk of developing it.

Please join me and Ovarian Cancer Canada by showing your support in recognition of World Ovarian Cancer Day.

I thank you, Speaker. I welcome the guests here today—all the moms, sisters, friends and family. We're thinking of you today.

FRAN STANUTZ

Mr. Taras Natyshak: In honour of Nursing Week, I'd like to recognize an exceptional nurse from our region of Windsor and Essex county. Our chapter of the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario has presented its annual Lois Fairley award. It goes to an exceptional nurse, Fran Stanutz.

Fran is the palliative care coordinator at the Hospice of Windsor and Essex County. She's had a remarkable career. She graduated from the Hotel Dieu school of nursing in 1968. She started working at the old IODE hospital in the intensive care ward.

Fran then, like so many other nurses in Windsor and Essex county, accepted a job in Detroit, at Lakeside. From there, it was on to the Detroit Osteopathic Hospital, as head nurse on the oncology floor. From there, it was off to the Detroit Medical Center in the area of radiation oncology. She later transferred to the bone marrow transplant floor.

After 18 years of nursing in Michigan, her husband took a job in Barrie. At first, Fran worked here in Toronto, at Princess Margaret, but the commute got to be too much, so she accepted a position at Bayshore Home Health. She spent 20 years with them as a nursing manager, and along the way was certified for hospice palliative care. That's when she was lured back to Windsor.

Fran says she can feel an angel on her shoulder when she's caring for hospice patients. She's great with volunteers, and her entire team is involved in mentoring and coaching young nursing students.

The award is named after the late local nurse, mentor and advocate for the nursing profession. Lois Fairley led by example, and Fran Stanutz exemplifies the true meaning and spirit of Lois Fairley by her leadership, advocacy, professionalism and compassion for nursing.

Congratulations, Fran, on this great honour.

WORLD OVARIAN CANCER DAY

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: Several weeks ago, I had the chance to meet with a Barrie constituent, Laura Zawadiuk, an advocate with Ovarian Cancer Canada, to

discuss their new #ladyballs campaign, so named to draw attention to the courage it takes to face this disease, discuss it openly and stand up against it.

Unfortunately, the symptoms of this disease are easy to mistake for something else, and there is no singular, definitive diagnostic test. Because of this, it often goes undetected, and many women, including Laura, need to be their own advocates and insist that certain tests are performed. Unfortunately, for too many, it means it's found too late.

As a cancer survivor myself, I know the importance of organizations like Ovarian Cancer Canada. They raise awareness about the signs and risk factors, fundraise for research for desperately needed new treatments, and provide resources and community support for families experiencing this terrible disease.

Every September since 2002, they have held the Walk of Hope, an event that now takes place in 40 communities across the country and that has raised over \$23 million to date.

Speaker, on World Ovarian Cancer Day, I would like to thank the survivors and the advocates here with us today, and those holding community events across Ontario, for their hard work and devotion to their cause.

I would also like to let everyone know that we will be distributing postcards to members on the #ladyballs campaign to help them advocate to the federal Minister of Health to further support research for a cure.

CANADIAN MERCHANT NAVY

Mr. Jim Wilson: I rise today on the anniversary of victory in Europe to pay tribute to those who fought and died in the defence of our liberty during World War II. Each year on this day, we gather throughout the province and worldwide to commit ourselves to never losing sight of the huge number of men and women who served both abroad and at home during such difficult times and the sacrifices they made on our behalf.

Today, I want to talk about a lesser-known group of veterans: those in the Canadian Merchant Navy. Mr. Speaker, merchant mariners played an important role in the war. They sailed transport ships carrying vital cargo and personnel to our allies on the front line. They sailed hazardous ocean passage routes, often in terrible weather and with the full knowledge that German "wolf packs"—submarines—lurked beneath the water to blow up their ships.

A total of 12,000 men and women served in Canada's merchant navy. Of those, over 1,700 lost their lives. In fact, the merchant navy suffered the most casualties of any Canadian fighting service.

The merchant navy was not an official entity of the military. In fact, the mariners were a volunteer organization. They held no military standing and had no formal training. They didn't receive government benefits or have uniforms that would identify them on land. As a result, their efforts did not garner the same recognition as other veterans after the war.

Last Thursday, in recognition of the sacrifice made by merchant mariners and their families, I introduced legislation proclaiming September 3 of each year as Merchant Navy Veterans Day. This legislation echoes federal legislation that was passed in 2003 and proclamations made by other provinces, including British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Nova Scotia. I hope that all members of this House will support this legislation and vote in favour of its swift passage.

MIKE FARWELL

Ms. Catherine Fife: May is Cystic Fibrosis Awareness Month, and in Kitchener–Waterloo, you can find Mike Farwell in the community raising funds for Cystic Fibrosis Canada. Through his third annual #Farwell4Hire campaign, Mike hires himself out for odd jobs in exchange for a donation.

Mike is a local radio host and a dedicated community servant, always eager to emcee an event.

Mike has lost two sisters to cystic fibrosis and still thinks of them over 20 years later. In a recent interview, Mike said, “My older sister [was] 24 years old. Nine months later, losing my little sister at the age of 18 was excruciating....

“[My sisters] got robbed of the last 20 years that I’ve had to try to do something. So that’s why I do it.”

In 20 years, cystic fibrosis research has come a long way. Today, the average life expectancy of someone living with cystic fibrosis has nearly doubled, and medical advances have improved the standard of care for patients.

Mike’s advocacy efforts on behalf of Cystic Fibrosis Canada and the cystic fibrosis community are tireless. Last year, he raised over \$40,000. This year, he hopes to raise \$50,000. Mike has said he is the luckiest man on earth, but I’d say that we are pretty lucky to have him as a community leader in Kitchener–Waterloo.

To Mike, we say, “Thank you,” and hopefully, “You’re hired.”

If you are interested in learning more about cystic fibrosis and supporting Mike’s campaign, I would encourage to you check out #Farwell4Hire online.

Thank you, Mike.

B.R. AMBEDKAR

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: Recently, I had the pleasure of attending the 126th birthday celebration of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in my great riding of Mississauga–Brampton South. Dr. Ambedkar was the architect of the Indian constitution.

Born in a Mahar family, considered an untouchable caste, he became a victim of India’s evil caste system. Dr. Ambedkar’s life proves that birth in a so-called untouchable caste doesn’t define success. It was his education and valiant fighting spirit against evil, coupled with the lofty goal of building a society without discrimination based upon colour, caste, creed and gender that defined his life’s success.

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He was the first Indian who earned a PhD abroad, in 1917. In fact, he earned four PhDs, including one from the London School of Economics—and his education at Columbia University.

Dr. Ambedkar’s life is a portrait of a true revolutionary spirit and of an intellectual of great depths. He was a jurist, economist, politician and social reformer. He dedicated his entire life to fighting against caste discrimination and gender inequality and for the upliftment of the economically marginalized.

I congratulate the celebration committee for organizing such an important and successful event.

BETH DONOVAN HOSPICE

Mr. Steve Clark: On Friday, I attended the grand opening of the Beth Donovan Hospice’s new “forever home” in Kemptville. It’s a beautiful space that will bring the invaluable services they provide in North Grenville and Merrickville–Wolford under one roof. I’m so proud of the staff, the amazing volunteers and the community for their tremendous support since the hospice began 25 years ago.

But there’s one essential piece missing. As in so many rural communities in Ontario, there is no funding from the local LHIN to operate residential hospice beds. It’s cruel to force rural families to take a loved one from the community they’ve called home for years to spend their final days. A rural resident from Oxford Mills or Eastons Corners has as much right to die in a residential hospice setting near home as someone in the city of Ottawa.

I’ve had many conversations with the minister and his parliamentary assistant about this funding; however, the time for conversations is over. These communities have been patient, but now they want action and a fair share of rural hospice funding. The member for Ottawa South visited the Beth Donovan Hospice with me, so he knows how much this means to our community. I ask him and the minister to join me in demanding the Champlain LHIN immediately approve these residential hospice beds and the funding to operate them.

CIVICS EDUCATION

Mrs. Cristina Martins: I rise today to inform the House about the fantastic visit that I had with students from Ms. Barclay’s grade 10 civics class from Bloor Collegiate Institute in my riding of Davenport.

This past Friday, I had the pleasure of welcoming this fantastic group of grade 10 students to my constituency office for an hour and a half to talk about how the Legislature works, how we come to decide on what is in the best interests of the public, and what life is like as an MPP. Having the opportunity to field questions and educate students on the work we do here is important, and I couldn’t have been more honoured to have had the opportunity.

We also had the opportunity to debate in the style of our Legislature. While the discourse was heated, I must say that this House could take a cue from the level of respect and decorum that these young adults showed each other.

I'm glad that one thing I didn't have the opportunity to talk to them about was members' statements and their purpose. So, for the students who are following along at home or online, members' statements are for informing the House about the great work, the important work, that is going on in our constituencies, whether it's by an organization, individuals—or, in this particular case, all the great learning and civics education being taught by Ms. Barclay to her grade 10 civics class at BCI.

I encourage all members of the House to carve out some time in their very busy schedules to speak to the civics classes in their constituencies. It's important that we teach about the work of this Legislature, and I must confess that it is some of the most rewarding work that I do.

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY

Mr. Jim McDonell: In March, I attended the Ottawa Valley Farm Show, where agricultural businesses from across eastern Ontario and the province showcased the innovation and progress our agri-food industry can be so proud of.

A local business from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, Homestead Organics, takes a leadership role in promoting sound, efficient organic farming across the country. At the farm show, they partnered with Canadian Organic Growers to launch the third edition of the Canadian Organic Field Crop Handbook, a comprehensive guide to starting a new organic business, transitioning to organic production and improving farm practices in the organic sector.

The challenges facing organic farming are not different from those facing all other agricultural enterprises. Producers must strive to achieve maximum yields, use resources, money and equipment efficiently, and ensure good practices are followed at every step of the production cycle.

The process of setting up a business or transitioning to organic farming can appear daunting. The handbook provides the information that prospective organic farmers need in order to set themselves up for success.

Businesses deserve their chance to succeed in Ontario. I am proud to see local organic producers taking a leadership role in building a stronger and better organic industry in our province. They make us proud.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all members for their statements.

PETITIONS

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Ted Arnott: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It reads as follows:

“Whereas the price of electricity has skyrocketed under the Ontario Liberal government;

“Whereas ever-higher hydro bills are a huge concern for everyone in the province, especially seniors and others on fixed incomes, who can't afford to pay more;

“Whereas Ontario's businesses say high electricity costs are making them uncompetitive, and have contributed to the loss of hundreds of thousands of manufacturing jobs;

“Whereas the recent Auditor General's report found Ontarians overpaid for electricity by \$37 billion over the past eight years and estimates that we will overpay by an additional \$133 billion over the next 18 years if nothing changes;

“Whereas the cancellation of the Oakville and Mississauga gas plants costing \$1.1 billion, feed-in tariff (FIT) contracts with wind and solar companies, the sale of surplus energy to neighbouring jurisdictions at a loss, the debt retirement charge, the global adjustment and smart meters that haven't met their conservation targets have all put upward pressure on hydro bills;

“Whereas the sale of 60% of Hydro One is opposed by a majority of Ontarians and will likely only lead to even higher hydro bills;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To listen to Ontarians, reverse course on the Liberal government's current hydro policies and take immediate steps to stabilize hydro bills.”

MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES

Mr. John Vanthof: I have a petition initiated by Lianne Paillé from Dymond township.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas many families are forced to deal with mental health and addiction issues in rural areas of northeastern Ontario without access to trained mental health care workers; and

“Whereas both medical and physiological treatment is difficult to access in smaller communities and many patients fall through the cracks in the system; and

“Whereas rehab centres and support networks for families and individuals are limited to larger centres such as Sudbury or North Bay;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To provide immediate and appropriate mental health care and addiction treatment to individuals and their families in the rural and remote areas of northeastern Ontario.”

I fully agree, affix my signature and give it to page Rishi.

ELEVATOR MAINTENANCE

Ms. Soo Wong: I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly.

"Whereas elevators are an important amenity for a resident of a high-rise residential building; and

"Whereas ensuring basic mobility and standards of living for residents remain top priority; and

"Whereas the unreasonable delay of repairs for elevator services across Ontario is a concern for all residents of high-rise buildings who experience constant breakdowns, mechanical failures and 'out of service' notices for unspecified amounts of time;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Urge the Ontario government to require repairs to elevators be completed within a reasonable and prescribed time frame. We urge this government to address these concerns that are shared by residents of Trinity-Spadina and across Ontario."

I support the petition and give my petition to page Maddison.

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Mr. Jim McDonell: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas a staff report has recommended Upper Canada District School Board close numerous schools across eastern Ontario; and

"Whereas access to quality local education is essential for rural communities to thrive; and

"Whereas the Ministry of Education removed community impact considerations from pupil accommodation review guidelines in 2015 and has cut essential rural school funding; and

"Whereas local communities treasure their public schools and have been active participants in their continued operation, maintenance and success; and

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"Whereas the Ontario government should focus on delivering quality, local education services to all communities, including rural Ontario; and

"Whereas the current PAR process forces bad behaviour by school boards to justify the replacement of high-maintenance outdated schools;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"(1) to support MPP Jim McDonell's motion to suspend all current PAR reviews until a strategic rural education plan is completed, engaging all rural school boards, school communities and municipalities;

"(2) to reinstate considerations of value to the local community and value to the local economy in pupil accommodation review guidelines; and

"(3) to engage all rural school boards, including the Upper Canada District School Board, school communities and municipalities in the development of the strategic rural education plan; and

"(4) consider rural education opportunities, student busing times, accessible extracurricular and inter-school activities, the schools' role as a community hub and its value to the local economy."

I agree with this and pass it off to page Matthew.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Mr. Guy Sivret from Chelmsford, in my riding, for this petition. It reads as follows:

"Whereas once you privatize Hydro One, there's no return; and

"Whereas we'll lose billions in reliable annual revenues for schools and hospitals; and

"Whereas we'll lose our biggest economic asset and control over our energy future; and

"Whereas we'll pay higher and higher hydro bills just like what's happened elsewhere;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To stop the sale of Hydro One and make sure Ontario families benefit from owning Hydro One now and for generations to come."

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask page Emma to bring it to the Clerk.

GOVERNMENT ANTI-RACISM PROGRAMS

Ms. Daiene Vernile: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Ontarians are concerned that individual, systemic and cultural racism continues to create unfair outcomes for racial minorities in Ontario;

"Whereas the time has come to remove the social and economic barriers that prevent our province from achieving true equality;

"Whereas in order to accomplish that objective and to tackle racism in all its forms, our government has created the new Anti-Racism Directorate;

"We, the undersigned, acknowledge both our support for the concept behind the Anti-Racism Directorate, and recognize that there is still work to be done to build an inclusive Ontario where everyone, regardless of their race, ethnicity, or cultural background, has an equal opportunity to succeed.

"Therefore, we petition the government to work with key partners, such as businesses, community organizations, educational institutions and the Ontario Human Rights Commission in an effort to create a scope for the Anti-Racism Directorate...."

Speaker, I agree with this, will put my name to it and give it to page Peter to bring down to you.

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Mr. Bill Walker: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas under the current Pupil Accommodation Review Guideline (PARG), one in eight Ontario schools is at risk of closure; and

"Whereas the value of a school to the local economy and community has been removed from the PARG; and

"Whereas the PARG outlines consultation requirements that are insufficient to allow for meaningful community involvement, including the establishment of community hubs; and

"Whereas school closures have a significant negative impact on families and their children, resulting in inequitable access to extracurricular activities and other essential school involvement, and after-school work opportunities; and

"Whereas school closures have devastating impacts on the growth and overall viability of communities across Ontario, in particular self-sustaining agricultural communities;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

"To place a moratorium on all school closures across Ontario and to suspend all pupil accommodation reviews until the PARG has been subject to a substantive review by an all-party committee that will examine the effects of extensive school closures on the health of our communities and children."

I fully support this, affix my name, and send it with page Kate.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I have a petition here at the beginning of Nursing Week to share.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas providing high-quality, universal, public health care is crucial for a fair and thriving Ontario; and

"Whereas years of underfunding have resulted in cuts to registered nurses (RNs) and hurt patient care; and

"Whereas, in 2015 alone, Ontario lost more than 1.5 million hours of RN care due to cuts; and

"Whereas procedures are being off-loaded into private clinics not subject to hospital legislation; and

"Whereas funded services are being cut from hospitals and are not being provided in the community; and

"Whereas cutting skilled care means patients suffer more complications, readmissions and death;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Implement a moratorium on RN cuts;

"Commit to restoring hospital base operating funding to at least cover the costs of inflation and population growth;

"Create a fully-funded multi-year health human resources plan to bring Ontario's ratio of registered nurses to population up to the national average;

"Ensure hospitals have enough resources to continue providing safe, quality and integrated care for clinical procedures and stop plans for moving such procedures into private, unaccountable clinics."

I wholeheartedly support this, will affix my name and send it with Sofia to the Clerk.

DENTAL CARE

Mr. Arthur Potts: I have a petition here to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario from my community of Crescent Town. It's a fantastic community, and I want to read their petition here.

"Whereas lack of access to dental care affects overall health and well-being, and poor oral health is linked to diabetes, cardiovascular, respiratory disease, and Alzheimer's disease; and

"Whereas it is estimated that two to three million people in Ontario have not seen a dentist in the past year, mainly due to the cost of private dental services; and

"Whereas approximately every nine minutes a person in Ontario arrives at a hospital emergency room with a dental problem but can only get painkillers and antibiotics, and this costs the health care system at least \$31 million annually with no treatment of the problem;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to invest in public oral health programs for low-income adults and seniors by:

"—ensuring that plans to reform the health care system include oral health so that vulnerable people in our communities have equitable access to the dental care they need to be healthy;

"—extending public dental programs for low-income children and youth within the next two years to include low-income adults and seniors; and

"—delivering public dental services in a cost-efficient way through publicly funded dental clinics such as public health units, community health centres and aboriginal health access centres to ensure primary oral health services are accessible to vulnerable people in Ontario."

I agree with this petition, sign it and leave it with page Charlene.

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Mr. Jeff Yurek: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas under the current Pupil Accommodation Review Guideline (PARG), one in eight Ontario schools is at risk of closure; and

"Whereas the value of a school to the local economy and community has been removed from the PARG; and

"Whereas the PARG outlines consultation requirements that are insufficient to allow for meaningful community involvement, including the establishment of community hubs; and

"Whereas school closures have a significant negative impact on families and their children, resulting in inequitable access to extracurricular activities and other essential school involvement, and after-school work opportunities; and

"Whereas school closures have devastating impacts on the growth and overall viability of communities across Ontario, in particular self-sustaining agricultural communities;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

"To place a moratorium on all school closures across Ontario and to suspend all pupil accommodation reviews until the PARG has been subject to a substantive review by an all-party committee that will examine the effects of extensive school closures on the health of our communities and children."

I agree with this petition and affix my signature.

DISASTER RELIEF

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Dinah Timmermans from Gogama for signing the petition, which reads as follows:

"Whereas at 2 a.m. on March 7, 2015, a Canadian National train derailed in Gogama;

"Whereas this derailment caused numerous tank cars carrying crude oil to explode, catch fire and spill over one million litres of oil into the Makami River; and

"Whereas residents continue to plainly observe oil and find dead fish in the Makami River as well as Lake Minisinakwa, despite the fact that the Ministry of the Environment has declared the cleanup complete";

They petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario "that the Ministry of the Environment require CN to continue the cleanup of Gogama's soil and waterways until the residents are assured of clean and safe water for themselves, the environment and the wildlife."

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask page Gracin to bring it to the Clerk.

WATER FLUORIDATION

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: A petition to the Legislative Assembly:

"Whereas community water fluoridation is a safe, effective and scientifically proven means of preventing dental decay, and is a public health measure endorsed by more than 90 national and international health organizations...; and

"Whereas the continued use of fluoride in community drinking water is at risk in Ontario cities representing more than 10% of Ontario's population, including the region of Peel; and

"Whereas the Ontario Legislature has twice voted unanimously in favour of the benefits of community water fluoridation, and the Ontario Ministries of Health and Long-Term Care and Municipal Affairs and Housing urge support for amending the Health Protection and Promotion Act and other applicable legislation to ensure community water fluoridation is mandatory and to remove provisions allowing Ontario municipalities to cease drinking water fluoridation, or fail to start drinking water fluoridation, from the Ontario Municipal Act;

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"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Premier of Ontario direct the Ministries of Municipal Affairs and Housing and Health and Long-Term Care to introduce legislation amending the Health Protection and Promotion Act and make changes to other applicable legislation and regulations to make the fluoridation of municipal drinking water mandatory in all municipal water systems across the province of Ontario."

I support this petition, affix my signature to it and hand it to page Katie.

ENERGY CONTRACTS

Mr. Jim McDonnell: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the Premier recently stated that it has been a mistake that government policies have caused electricity bills to rise so dramatically, resulting in hardship for thousands of Ontarians; and

"Whereas on September 27, 2016, Minister Thibeault announced that because Ontario has a sufficient supply of all forms of energy to meet demands over the next decade, he was suspending the LRP-II process; and

"Whereas according to the IESO and the government, the trend has been toward declining energy consumption in the province, decreasing the need for new generation; and

"Whereas overpayment for unneeded wind and solar energy in Ontario is causing Ontarians' electricity bills to rise to increasingly unaffordable levels; and

"Whereas over half of Ontarians' power bills are regulatory, delivery charges and the global adjustment; and

"Whereas the global adjustment is a tangible measure of how much Ontario must overpay for unneeded wind and solar power, and the cost of offloading excess power to our neighbours to the south at a significant loss; and

"Whereas many LRP I projects are approved by the IESO without community support or agreement, without abutting landowner agreements, and without prior local First Nations support, although these priorities were well-advertised in the process; and

"Whereas the 'Notice to Proceed' stage which triggers most of the IESO commercial commitments has not happened; and

"Whereas the IESO's payment of pre-NTP costs would be a tiny fraction of the projects' avoided capital investments:

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To immediately cancel all LRP-I contracts, such as Nation Rise Wind project in North Stormont."

I agree with this and will pass it off to page Gabriel.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Unfortunately, that concludes the time we have available for petitions this afternoon.

Orders of the day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

STRONGER, HEALTHIER ONTARIO ACT (BUDGET MEASURES), 2017

LOI DE 2017 POUR UN ONTARIO PLUS FORT ET EN MEILLEURE SANTÉ (MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 4, 2017, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 127, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact, amend and repeal various statutes / Projet de loi 127, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter, à modifier ou à abroger diverses lois.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Hon. Liz Sandals: I'm very pleased to be able to rise and speak in support of the 2017 budget this afternoon. Of course, as I think everyone knows now—oh, and I am going to share my time with the member for Beaches—East York and the member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore.

As everyone knows, I think, by now, we have a balanced budget for 2017-18. In fact, we will also have a balanced budget in 2018 and 2019. So this is very good news for Ontario.

It's also been hard work because, quite frankly, we have had to be very careful about our spending. We've reined in spending in a lot of areas, found savings and reformed programs. OSAP is a great example of a program where we have reformed the program and made it more effective so that we can help more students have free tuition with approximately the same amount of money.

But the thing that we've done is, we've been careful not to cut and slash while we have been doing restraint. That means that the economy has continued to grow. In fact, if you look at the growth in all of the G7 countries, including Canada as a whole, Ontario has outpaced economic growth in every single one of the members of the G7, including Canada as a whole, and because the Ontario economy has continued to grow, that means that we're able to make some very exciting investments in this year's 2017 budget. So it isn't just a case of having come to balance; it's a case of being able to invest in those services like health care and education and continuing to build infrastructure that Ontarians rely on.

I think the really exciting signature piece in this year's budget is the—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Sorry to interrupt.

There's an incessant din coming from the left side of the House. I would ask the members to quiet down so I can hear the President of the Treasury Board, who has the floor.

Hon. Liz Sandals: Thank you very much.

The thing that we are very, very proud of in this year's budget is a universal pharmacare program for Ontario's children, youth and young adults. In fact, it's a universal pharmacare program for everyone under the age of 25. What do we mean by "universal"? We mean that every individual who is under 25 years of age will qualify for this program. It doesn't matter what the family income is; every person in Ontario who has an OHIP card will qualify for this program. There isn't any copayment; there isn't any deductible. It means that if you've got a prescription from your doctor and your OHIP card, you can go to any pharmacy in Ontario come January 1, 2018, and you can get the drug you need.

The other thing that we've done with this program is that all 4,400 drugs that are on the Ontario drug formulary will be available through this program. The reason that that is so very, very important: Obviously, this program is going to be really important to families who are low income and have no drug benefit program, because they struggle to pay for even the simplest of prescriptions—the antibiotics for a child's ear infection. For many families who are middle income, those occasional prescriptions for antibiotics or something to deal with those occasional childhood diseases aren't a big deal. What's a big deal is if the child has a chronic disease, if the child has a rare disease or if, God help us, the child has cancer or some really life-threatening incident. Because all 4,400 drugs are on the formulary, that means that no matter what sort of disease the child or young person has, they'll be able to get those drugs covered.

It isn't just pharmacare. We're investing in hospitals. I was really pleased on Friday to be able to announce, in Guelph and Wellington—for those of you who don't know, I'm talking to one of our Acting Speakers, who happens to share the geography of Ontario with me. He represents most of Wellington, and I represent Guelph. I was able to announce funding increases for all the hospitals in Guelph and Wellington. When we put them all together, we get a \$4.2-million increase just in Guelph and Wellington.

On top of that, the money is in the budget for construction to continue at Groves Memorial Community Hospital in Fergus, in the Speaker's riding.

So we're doing not just pharmacare but a lot of other great things in health care.

Now I'm going to turn it over to my colleague from Beaches—East York, I believe.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I recognize the member for Beaches—East York.

Mr. Arthur Potts: The minister is quite right: She is turning the debate over to me at this time. I too, of course, am delighted to be able to announce and be here to participate in debate on a balanced budget, the first in over 10 years.

What's particularly of interest in this for me is that it was a fundamental campaign promise when we were elected three years ago, one that I ran on in my community. This budget fulfills a promise that was made at the

time. What is extremely important about it is that it demonstrates it is a truly balanced budget, because it is going to be projecting out for the next three years to continue to be balanced. At the same time as the economy is growing, it will allow us additional opportunities to invest new expenditures in the province of Ontario to help build Ontario up.

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So there's so much more in this budget than the signature piece and the pharmacare.

One of the things we didn't talk about yet today, certainly, is in pharmacare—how this is a nation-leading program, Speaker. This is a program where we're coming forward and starting to send the signal that, yes, as part of all health care in the province of Ontario, pharmacare should be there universally. Although our plan doesn't get to universality, it does provide a very significant segment of our population with access to 4,400 drugs. That needs to be done. We sent that signal in a very fiscally responsible way. We certainly have no disagreement with the members of the third party that this should be a program. We have been advocating for years at the federal level, through our Minister of Health, through our Premier and at Premier meetings across the country, that we would like to do a universal plan. It's now up to the federal government to step up and to send the signal, and to other provinces to step up.

There's a parallel here, Speaker, that relates to the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan. We took that initiative; we led. When we were negotiating with a very, very hostile government in Ottawa—a government in Ottawa, I would remind people, that the current Leader of the Opposition was a backbencher in, and not a very active backbencher. We've been trying to find examples of him speaking, and they're very hard to come by. He was somewhat silent for his many years in Ottawa. Nonetheless, he was part of a government that not only increased the debt load of the government of Canada by unprecedented amounts, but was there not supporting our retirement initiatives at the time.

We took the initiative in Ontario, under the leadership of our Premier, to say we needed to boost people's retirement income. That, too, was a significant promise that we made in the 2014 election: that we would address opportunities to enhance people's retirement incomes. Because we did not have the co-operation of the feds, we went out on our own. In my own riding, I took some heat for the additional bureaucracy, for the additional costs, because people thought, "Why don't you just get together with the federal government and do a national program?" They wouldn't do it. But once the government changed, and once we had a receptive ear in the federal government, then they did take this notion, because it was important that we improve people's retirement income.

So the parallel here, Speaker, is that we're doing the same thing now with pharmacare. I'm very excited that we're proceeding in that direction.

There is, again, so much more in this budget of tremendous interest—in health care, particularly.

Another one of the campaign promises that I made in my community—because it was the calling of the election in 2014, because the members of the third party over there wouldn't support one of the most progressive budgets, if not the most progressive budget in decades. They wouldn't support it. As a result, funding for our local hospital, the Toronto East General Hospital, was put at risk. They were in the midst of a rebuild. They had designs and planning in the works. Had we not come forward and made government in 2014—they knew those investments in health care in our community were gravely at risk, because they heard the messages from the official opposition about slashing jobs, getting to balance by cutting programs and cutting services. That was going to be unpalatable. So in my community, the Toronto East General Hospital was able to continue its planning.

I'm so delighted to announce that in this budget, we are providing an extra \$11.5 billion into the health care system. As part of our \$190-billion plan over the next 13 years, there is sufficient funding in that program that Toronto East General Hospital—now renamed the Michael Garron Hospital, I would add, as a result of a very generous gift from the Garron family, after their son Michael—that program continues. They are now evaluating the request for proposals, they are looking for that builder, and I'm hearing estimates that this could be upwards of a \$400-million booster shot in my own community to help create the most efficient, well-run health care of a very difficult population, which is lower-income, new Canadians, with complex needs, complex disorders. This additional funding will allow us to build a new patient care wing, which is being named after the Thomson family because of their generous gift, and we will be able to get rid of ward rooms in my hospital where we have four, five or six people in the same room in a ward. In this day of infectious disease, Speaker, it's so important that we get our hospital rooms where you're managing one person at a time so as not to transfer anything. Our new patient care wing is going to accommodate a whole raft of new rooms to provide better health care services in the community.

I'm also pleased to say that we have additional funding in education, again part of that \$190-billion program in education. We're building new schools. We're rebuilding George Webster school, which is in the north part of my riding, and I'm just delighted about that, because the school was old, falling down, single-storey and wasn't meeting the needs of the community. In fact, there were so many kids there that the Toronto District School Board had to lease space from another school, a Catholic school nearby, in order to accommodate the influx of new students.

We've also got, in transportation, the Eglinton LRT. When that came forward with David Miller and Adam Giambrone, it was a program for which the province of Ontario stepped up with 100% of the funding. We're now going to continue to move forward with new funding for new projects in Ontario, including right through my riding of Beaches—East York, where at the corner of

Main and Danforth, where the GO rail is, we're going to get regional express rail coming from Stouffville, coming from the Lakeshore East line. We'll have downtown service every seven to eight minutes at Main and Danforth, to get people downtown in 10 minutes.

This is what our budget has done, what it has done extraordinarily well. I, for one, am very proud to support it. I certainly hope other members in the Legislature will.

I'll turn it over to the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Etobicoke–Lakeshore.

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: I rise with great pride to speak to budget 2017-18.

I was first elected to municipal office some 23 years ago. I've prided myself throughout my career on keeping the commitments that I've made to my constituents.

Back in 2014 when I ran in Etobicoke–Lakeshore, I committed to my constituents that this government would bring about a balanced budget during the term and that we would continue investing in transit and other key infrastructure for my community and communities across this province—a promise made; a promise kept. I'm very proud of that, Mr. Speaker.

In this budget, we're enhancing our historic commitment to infrastructure spending by going from \$160 billion over 12 years to \$190 billion over 13 years. To compare that to the very important and very welcome announcement in the federal budget, the national government will be spending just over \$180 billion during that time frame across the whole country. We're spending more than that just in our beautiful province.

In the city of Toronto, where I served on councils where we struggled to secure funding from other orders of government and where we saw plans being created that could never be funded—that's where I spent my formative years as a municipal councillor. Now, as an elected member of provincial Parliament, I'm proud to see historic investments in the city of Toronto—a government that is the single biggest contributor of transit funding to the city of Toronto in our history. Mr. Speaker, this is great news.

Last year—I know it rolls over into this budget—we provided \$150 million towards the planning of the downtown relief line, a key additional element of the transit solutions for the city of Toronto and for the GTHA. That is our down payment and our ongoing commitment to building infrastructure in the city.

But this budget is about more than just bricks and mortar and rails. It's about people. My wife and I are part of the sandwich generation. We have a beautiful, soon-to-be-eight-year-old daughter, and we also have aging parents. This budget contains so much for my family and for my neighbours and my friends. This budget includes a historic commitment to pharmacare so that young people 24 and under in this province will never again have to worry about the medications that they need; that family doctors will never again, when you go and see them with a sick child, ask you, "Do you have a health

plan? Do you have prescription coverage?" because they know that many families struggle with that. They'll know now that if a child needs prescription medication, that prescription will be filled and it will continue to be filled until it's no longer needed. This is so incredibly important to our families.

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On the other end of the spectrum, Mr. Speaker, with our older Ontarians, there is much in this budget to help them and to help those who care for them: historic investments in support for caregivers; caregivers' tax credit; opportunities for more respite programs in our communities so that, for those dedicated sons and daughters who look after their parents and other family members, there's something there to help them ease their burden, give them some respite, give them some additional supports.

There are additional funds in this budget to help our hospitals which are straining with the load that is placed on them: an across-the-board increase in hospital budgets across the province which will help alleviate waiting times in emergency wards and make sure they can continue to provide excellent service; investments in a number of elective surgeries that will reduce those waitlists, across the board. That's so incredibly important.

In my community of Etobicoke–Lakeshore, I remember a time when another party was in government, where our local hospital, the Queensway hospital, was going to be closed—not reduced, but closed. In this budget, there is a historic investment in hospital expansions across the province, but my community hospital, part of the Trillium Health Partners, the Queensway site, will see significant investment. The sister site in Mississauga will see over 500 new acute-care beds, and our Etobicoke–Lakeshore site will see over 100 post-acute-care beds put there which will provide support to those people as they transition out of the hospital and hopefully back to their homes soon. These are very important investments in my community, and they're mirrored in communities across the province.

As I said at the beginning, I pride myself on keeping the commitments that I make to my constituents. We've balanced the budget, we're investing in our infrastructure, and we're investing in our health care and education systems to help Ontarians, and people in my community as well.

Mr. Speaker, this is not just a good budget; it is a great budget. The calls I hear from across the floor are perhaps pangs of a guilty conscience, because when you claimed that you had a balanced budget, it was actually a \$5-billion deficit. That's your guilt. We're proud of what we're doing.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Randy Hillier: It's interesting that, for a group that is so proud of their budget, not one of them could find enough to say about it to take up their 20-minute rotation. They had to actually divide it up amongst three members to find something enough to say about this budget. But, Speaker, the problem with the government's

budget is not so much the document as the authors of it. This government has no credibility when it comes to financial management or any fiscal responsibility.

I don't need to talk about all the scandals and whatnot. We can talk about their day-to-day incompetence of the management of the province's budget. Last week in public accounts, the ministry of training, colleges and universities was there with Employment Ontario. Employment Ontario creates employment opportunities or jobs programs for the unemployed. Their budget last year was \$1.3 billion. Out of that \$1.3 billion that they spent to help people get jobs, only 10% of the people who went through those employment programs actually got a job they were trained for—one in 10.

They did do a little bit better. One third of people actually got some work after doing the employment programs, but fully two thirds were still unemployed after the employment programs—\$1.3 billion, and they've been doing this for a long time. The Second Career program has been going on for eight years, and they can only get one in 10 people trained effectively and have a job. Fiscal mismanagement is their stock in trade.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

M^{me} France Gélinas: It was interesting to listen to 20 minutes divided amongst three MPPs on the Liberal side. Same thing—there's a 294-page document that we're talking about, and they cannot find 20 minutes of good things to say about it. Right there, I am worried, but I am even more worried that we have a new, seventh drug plan. Ontario has six drug plans; we will have a seventh one. It is great that youth and children and babies will have their drugs covered, but I'm worried that it will be a hard cliff to look at once you turn 25.

Let's be clear. The number of prescriptions filled for that age group is about one in 100. The money that we spent on covering four million youth is one tenth of the money we spend to cover the elderly population at 65. It's fine to cover children, but I'm worried about the cliff. What happens at 25? As much as it is important to cover children, it is important to cover their parents too. When you look at 2.2 million workers in Ontario who get up every day to go to work and don't have a drug plan—they are still left with nothing.

When the NDP, or anybody else, talks about a universal plan, "universal" means whoever you are, no matter how old you are, but we still don't have that. To start with a universal plan would have been better.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mr. Yvan Baker: It's an honour to join the debate. There were comments made by the members opposite that we were sharing our 20 minutes. The reason we're sharing our 20 minutes is because we have more members than the members of the opposition do. I was speaking with the government House leader's office. Our members were actually fighting to get a chance to speak to this budget, so we had to share the time.

With regard to financial management, I am not going to take lessons from that member or that party on fiscal

management. First of all, we took a thoughtful approach to balancing the budget under the leadership of the previous Treasury Board president, who's here, and the current one, and the Minister of Finance. We've taken a thoughtful, measured approach and gone through every program in government to look at how we can get better value for money and how we can better results for taxpayers.

That's exactly how we went about balancing the budget—not the way that member and that party did, by slashing and burning the public services that underpin the quality of life that we enjoy here in Ontario; by closing hospitals and putting teachers out on the street. The NDP would appreciate that. The kinds of things the PCs did when they were in office to balance the budget are unacceptable in this the province, and we didn't go down that path. For them to lecture us now on how to balance the budget I think is laughable.

I also think it's laughable because, in the best of economic times—they were in office when Ontario had record economic growth. What did they do? They slashed taxes and had trouble balancing the budget, so they had to resort, in an election year, to selling off the 407 to balance the budget in the final year on a one-time basis. Now the PCs have the gall to lecture us. As someone who has two business degrees and who studied economics and finance and advised companies on how to manage their money, I'm not going to take lessons from that member on fiscal management.

Lastly, I'm just going to add quickly, on the issue of pharmacare: I'm really proud of this pharmacare plan, the OHIP+ plan. I have to remind the NDP member who talked about how adults won't benefit from this: There are four million children out there, all of whom have parents who will benefit from this because they're the ones, the vast majority of the time, who are absorbing the costs.

1400

I'm really proud of this budget, and I'm proud of the way we're moving ahead, both in terms of funding services and in terms of our fiscal plan.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jeff Yurek: We've heard a lot from the other side of the House in regard to this budget. Not one of them is talking about the \$5-billion hole that is in their balanced budget. Utilizing the sale of Hydro One in order to balance the budget, claiming the assets of the teachers' pension to balance the budget, and using their cap-and-trade to balance the budget are one-offs. What's going to happen next year? What are they going to sell off next year in order to balance the budget?

It's quite unfortunate; this government was jumping up and down during Stephen Harper's years about the health transfer, but accepted the same deal from Prime Minister Trudeau, simply because he's a Liberal. They stopped caring about the people of Ontario and took partisan lines with regard to how—they should still be jumping up and down about how the federal government has changed and drastically cut the health transfers.

Mr. Speaker, this budget offers little for my riding. Five schools are still going to close due to this government's incompetence. The Dutton wind farm is still going to be built. Some 84% of the constituents of the municipality of Dutton Dunwich voted, "No, we don't want these wind turbines built in our riding." They want their municipality to have autonomy again. This government failed those people. They're failing the people of Elgin county.

This government has ignored children's mental health. If you look at the stats, it's trending in the wrong direction. When they could have had funds in order to fill capacity into the communities—instead, our ER visits are skyrocketing, our hospitalizations are skyrocketing, and children are going years without access to services because of this government's incompetence and lack of fiscal management.

It's about time they start listening to both opposition parties and start to get the books balanced and follow the people of Ontario and deliver the health care services that we deserve and need.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our questions and comments.

The member for Etobicoke–Lakeshore can reply.

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: I want to thank the members for Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington, Nickel Belt, Etobicoke Centre and Elgin–Middlesex–London for their comments.

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, we have been listening. We've been listening to our friends across the chamber, and we've been listening to Ontarians. We've balanced the budget. We're making investments in our health care and education systems. We're making investments in critical infrastructure across the province, in small towns and communities across the north and rural Ontario, in our medium and big cities, and in the city of Toronto.

As I said earlier, I rise with great pride on this budget. It's not a budget like every other one. It is a budget that is balanced. It was balanced through economic growth—because Ontario is exceeding the performance of most other jurisdictions in the western world—but it was also done through the very hard work by members of the Treasury Board and the Ministry of Finance to control our spending, to make it more efficient, to extract as much value as they could for our taxpayers, and by doing that, finding funds to invest in the services that matter to Ontarians.

This budget does include increases in funding for hospitals to reduce wait times for surgeries, more support for seniors in their homes, more support for special programs for our youth and children, more support for mental health services. It builds more schools. It builds more hospital capacity. It builds transit and invests in affordable housing.

This budget is not just balanced fiscally, but it's balanced in terms of priorities and imperatives of the residents of Ontario. This is a good budget. I call on the opposition to support it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Bill Walker: It's a pleasure to rise and provide my comments on the budget bill, on behalf of my constituents in Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, and also as the PC critic for seniors, long-term care and accessibility.

I want to begin with a bit of good news in this budget before getting into the reality of what it really is going to mean for Ontarians. They are suggesting that it's a balanced budget. We've been pushing for that, but, at the end of the day, there is a \$5-billion hole. Everyone else out there is questioning it; they're challenging it. They have one-time revenue sources that they're not going to have next year. They're using the sell-off of Hydro One—which, by the way, they didn't have in their election platform, and 85% of people say, "Don't do it."

One of the members—Etobicoke–Lakeshore, I believe—just said that they're listening to Ontarians. I'm not certain what that means when 85% of the people tell you they don't want you to do something and you steamroll ahead anyway.

They sold that so they could feed their election narrative, which is to say they balanced the budget. Hydro One was the price Ontarians paid and will continue to pay to keep the Liberal Party, in their minds, in power, but I think Ontarians are wise to it. I think they know this is a shell game they are playing, and they've had enough. Life is harder under these Liberals.

The fire sale of public assets: They sold the LCBO, they sold head office for OPG, which again are one-time sales. They have \$500 million from the teachers' pension plan. Again, the Auditor General has said those are not assets that you can liquidate, that you can dispose of. At the end of the day, there's another asset where they are claiming half a billion dollars' worth in there.

They have a one-time transfer from the federal government. As my colleague from Elgin–Middlesex–London just said, they were making huge cries in regard to the federal government when Mr. Harper was Prime Minister, and yet with Mr. Trudeau it's all rosy and they accepted the exact same deal that they totally went crazy and ballistic on Mr. Harper for. It's interesting, that \$1.5-billion trust fund: Have they got an agreement from the Prime Minister every year to get that? Let's not forget, we're still a have-not province. We're still accepting money from the federal government. We used to be the leader of Confederation, Mr. Speaker, and we have had the hand out for many years under this Liberal government, and it's the same thing.

You can almost hear the backroom dealings going on now. "Somehow we'll make this work, even if it doesn't add up," because we've continued to play the shell game with numbers. In the six years I've been here, you can't almost trust a number they come out with. At the end of the day, they told us that the gas plants were going to cost the taxpayer of Ontario \$40 million. It was \$1.1 billion, Mr. Speaker. I'll repeat that: \$1.1 billion from \$40 million. Even the Liberals should be able to admit that was a little bit of a miscalculation. At some point, the people of Ontario have to start asking questions: What can we truly believe with those numbers? They were sup-

posed to have eHealth up and running. I believe the original number, again from their perspective, was going to be \$2 billion; it's \$8 billion, and there's nothing to show for it yet again.

At the end of the day, I think the people in Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound give me a loud and clear message to ask the government, "Can we trust you? Can we trust any of the numbers that you bring out?" I don't think this budget is any different when you bring \$5 billion to the table that is one-time, special one-offs that are not truly balancing the budget and will not be there next year.

If the members in the back benches are still in denial about their Liberal economics, they should listen to the message from the Financial Accountability Officer, whose report was very clear: The government's promise to balance the budget by 2017-18, just in time for the next election, can only be met using artificial solutions. This isn't the official opposition; this isn't the third party saying it. This is an arm's-length third-party member of the Legislature who is questioning whether this is truly a balanced budget and whether it's sustainable. In his Economic and Fiscal Outlook, he says the budget has an actual deficit of \$2.6 billion. So if we take \$5 billion and there's a deficit of \$2.6 billion, that's actually \$7.6 billion that we, as Ontarians, have to question this government: Can you validate? Can you substantiate?

I'm going to intermix a few because I don't believe we would ever, if there's a good idea—and our leader has said that if there's a good idea, let's do it. There are some good things in this budget.

They did actually suggest money for dementia care, which I think is huge. That is a problem in our society, particularly in our province, that is going to continue to grow. They put \$100 million over three years to support and care for people with dementia as early as possible, once a diagnosis is made, by expanding their access to programs in the community, retirement homes, long-term-care homes and day-away programs. The promise is to also use some of this money to support caregivers. This is a welcome step, albeit details are still lacking. We all need to ensure that those funds get to the front line.

My colleagues and I have been calling for improvements to front-line resources to better support seniors with Alzheimer's and related dementias and for a fully funded dementia strategy—but it's in the details. It's one thing to say, "Here's \$100 million over three years." It's kind of like they say they have all that infrastructure, but all they do is, they keep adding numbers and years to it. What we really want to see is how much of that money is truly getting to the front line so that it's actually helping people.

The problem we have heard time and time again from patients and families is that access to dementia supports and care continues to lag post-diagnosis. I don't believe the government has provided clarity yet as to how these funds will be allotted across Ontario, especially as it concerns diagnosis. It's key to get there and get that person some care as quickly as possible so we can prevent it, so we can slow it down, so we can give both the

patient and the caregiver some kind of support, some kind of assurance that there is hope and that we're there for them. We again want to know the detail, and we want to hear in the near future from the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

1410

The second item that was positive was the dedicated behavioural supports, or BSO, services to meet the needs of older people with cognitive impairments who exhibit challenging and complex behaviours. With a new \$10-million investment in 2017-18, the total BSO commitment is now \$64 million, representing a \$20-million increase in the past two years. Again, good news: They're putting it out to where there's need in that one specific area. But as the experts have said, the goal should be to have a BSO resource in every long-term-care home in Ontario, and I don't believe we have received any information from the government if in fact they will be doing that. When they come out with these grandiose announcements of money, we want to see the detail. We want to be able to have some trust that they're coming out with the money and it's truly going to get to the front line of care and to the patient. That's the most critical thing we need.

There was \$20 million extra in 2017 for 1.2 million hours for respite care and unpaid caregivers: family and friends of seniors and people living with dementia and other home care patients. Again, we want to know: How is this coming out? How do people access it? What's the reality of that money actually flowing to the person? With these new investments in respite care, the province's three-year investment will be \$120 million, but the devil is in the details. Is it truly getting to the front line?

I want to remind people here that, again, the Auditor General last year came out in regard to community care access centres and said that 38 cents of every dollar was going to administration. You can take \$120 million and say it's a wonderful thing if you only read the headlines, but we want to make sure it doesn't fall into that quagmire where almost 40 cents goes into administration, bureaucracy and spinning paper. We want those dollars to go to the front line and ensure that it gets there to the caregiver, who won't benefit from a credit against taxes. CARP, the Canadian Association of Retired Persons, is advocating for a refundable caregiver tax credit or a means-tested caregiver allowance. We want to see that those ideas have been implemented and are there to ensure the taxpayers are getting the dollars they need.

One of the concerns I'm starting to hear about more often is the lack of meal prep supports for seniors who are aging at home. One of them is Gail Gadsby's 82-year-old mom, who has complex care needs. The Owen Sound CCAC has assigned her three visits a week, about an hour each, which includes helping take a bath, but no help with the activities of daily living, such as laundry and meal preparation. The CCAC has advised that the family can ask for it, but it likely won't be funded because it's "outside their scope."

I think we need to be looking at these people. The keyword that the government always says is "listening"—

listening to the people who have the care needs and making sure the need is met by the actual dollars and the resources that are there.

It's troubling to think that serving the needs of seniors does not include some form of keeping them safe and healthy in their home with basic meal assistance. I don't think there's anyone out there who could argue that that isn't truly a health and safety concern, and yet the government says they're not certain it can be funded because it's outside their scope.

While these are welcome investments in the budget, as I said earlier, the Liberals did not make any commitments to the most critical piece: increasing capacity by adding new beds. As critic, I've been asking the government at every opportunity, whether it be in estimates, whether it be in this House through questions or whether it be by direct correspondence to the minister. There are 26,500 seniors on today's waiting list for a nursing bed. They did not announce one new bed. They did not announce anything really even looking towards new beds, and we've already been told by the industry that that list will double to over 50,000 required beds in six years, yet there's nothing in there.

What they actually talked about was more redevelopment. They've been redeveloping beds for 14 years under their administration, yet if you ask anyone out there if they're comfortable that those beds will be there when we need them, the answer is a resounding no.

They're talking about 30,000 beds which will all come offline in 2025 as a result of a directive they gave, yet many of these operators I talked to say that there is nothing there that makes them really, truly assured that they'll have their licences. Why would they step up, with the way the funding formula is working, to make it sustainable and a reality going down the road?

What happens to those people who are already in beds? There are 26,500 more already on a waiting list. That's going to grow to 50,000, and yet there's not one single word in the budget about how they're going to address this.

These are seniors who built our great province and yet we do not even show them the respect in the budget to say, "We are going to take care of you. We will give you hope that we will take care of you."

They've ignored this file for almost 14 years. When I ask at estimates, they can't even give me the list of where they were going to redevelop the beds and what timeline they were going to build them on. To me it was a 30,000-bed announcement with no reality. I'm back to: Is there credibility in their numbers? Can we trust their numbers if they cannot give me something as simple as where the plan is to redevelop those beds and on what timeline?

They're trying now to play catch-up by shuffling the decks. They're saying, "We're going to put money here; we're going to put money there," but is it truly going to satisfy the needs of the people we know?

What happens to these 26,500 frail seniors who are sitting there at home wondering where they're going to go? The caregivers are asking the exact same question:

Where is my mom or dad, where is my brother, sister, aunt or uncle going to go with a government that has not said one single word about developing one single new bed?

The government's lack of action on long-term-care beds is, frankly, inexcusable and appears to be confusing even to their own ministers.

I'm going to switch a little bit, Mr. Speaker, and talk about the redevelopment of beds. The Minister of Energy was quoted in *The Nugget* one week ago, promising new beds. He said, and I quote from that article, "The budget includes 72 new long-term-care beds for Mattawa." But frankly, Mr. Speaker, that's not true, as the 72 beds are rebuilds of existing ones, not additional beds. That is not new. They may be actually a new physical bed, but it's not new in the actual quantity of beds that are going to be available to the seniors of Mattawa.

It's a bit of a shell game here: They use terminology where, if people don't look at the details, they say, "New beds. That's wonderful." But if they go and actually say, "Dad is on a waiting list. Mom is on a waiting list. When am I going to be able to access that new bed?" the answer they're going to get is, "Oh, those weren't new beds; those are just redeveloped beds. They're going to look a little different, but there are no new significant beds being built."

They know they have created a crisis in long-term care. So it still leaves us wondering: If 26,500 seniors on the wait-list isn't a call to action to add new beds, then how many more seniors will have to be wait-listed in Ontario before the Premier acts on this very important issue?

A number of seniors' groups, including the Ontario Long Term Care Association and AdvantAge, formerly known as the Ontario Association of Non-Profit Homes and Services for Seniors, expressly asked for new long-term-care beds. The budget did not deliver any. A senior, Cathy McCartney, in my riding sums it up like this: "I believe the seniors of Ontario are being left out. Some of us can hardly get by on the OAS and CPP. We seniors need glasses, hearing aids and dentures, and I think we should get some help from the government. It is disgusting to see some seniors not able to eat proper food. We hardly ever get a cost of living added to OAS, and when we do get a raise, it wouldn't buy us a cup of coffee. I and many other seniors paid part of our CPP but we sure aren't getting back what we should. I'm really upset with the government today, as we are being left out. What is happening in this world? Something is not right here."

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to transition into something that I've spoken in this House a great deal about: school closures. Sadly, it appears a similar narrative applies to students with special needs in rural schools. This government continues to ignore Ontarians' call for a moratorium on mass school closures. Consider that the Premier told Ontarians she was going to run an education government and to trust her with their education in their schools. Yet two years after Ontarians put her party back

in power, she is overseeing the largest wave of school closings in Ontario's history. They like to trot out and say how many new schools they're building. What they don't say, Mr. Speaker, is how many they are closing and how many communities are actually going to be ruined as a result of their ideology and willingness to not listen.

They have just appointed a three-person panel to go out and start listening. There are already schools in many of our ridings that have closed and will never return because of their action. There are many more on the chopping block today, and if they are only going out to do a dog-and-pony show, to try to do some damage control, that is simply not acceptable.

Two reports, as I shared this morning in question period, by People for Education and the Ontario Alliance Against School Closures, show this government is hollowing out schools across rural Ontario. Three experts who submitted a report published by Municipal World said this about the Liberal school closures—again, a third party, nothing to do with us as opposition, nothing to do with the third party: “In Ontario, the education policy is driven by the funding formula dictating that the ideal size of an elementary school is in the neighbourhood of 500 to 800 students regardless of the characteristics of the surrounding community. This one-size-fits-all approach may work well in urban settings that have the population to support it; but, it does not translate well in ... rural surroundings.” They said the formula was biased against rural Ontario.

I have been challenging the government to fix this funding formula. In both of the elections, 2011 and 2014, that I ran in as a candidate, the government of the day came out and said, “We realize there's a problem. We will fix this funding formula. We will do that.” They made an election promise, Mr. Speaker, and yet it has fallen on deaf ears. They have not changed one thing; in fact, they've removed \$450 million in special funding for rural Ontario and northern Ontario out of their actual financial allocations.

So, as I said in this morning's question period, it is so sad: They have no money to keep schools open, but they were quick to find money to cancel two gas plants for \$1.1 billion and waste \$8 billion on eHealth consultants with nothing, zero, a big, big goose egg, to show for it. I hear some heckling, and that's fine. I assume, when I ask these questions and I say it, that I get to the guilt of some of them. Those over there that are actually speaking up must know that what I'm saying is true, because otherwise, why would they have to say anything, Mr. Speaker? They are challenging it, and yet it's a fact. They have closed more schools in their tenure of 14 years than any other government in our province's history.

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Small business is hurting. The Liberal government has promised a reduction of hydro rates by an average of 25% under the fair hydro plan. Julie Kwiecinski of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business says that its 42,000 Ontario members are in “wait-and-see mode” with regard to its effects. Small businesses in my riding

are saying that they're left out of the Liberals' hydro reduction schemes, including Hellyer's food market and the Chesley Grocery Store. These are small businesses in small communities. They cannot absorb continual 40% increases in their hydro. They have the coolers and they have all of the refrigeration they have to run, as well as the lighting and all of the other things to keep their stores operational. They cannot absorb 40% increases.

Moving in that same direction, we saw nothing in this budget—and I'm going to talk a little bit about the 25% relief program that's coming in. The Liberals are great at coming out and saying, “We've got yet another relief program; we've got another relief program; and here's another relief program.” Do they ever actually go back and address why they need more relief? I can't believe they're that proud to have the need for so many relief programs. Why would they not do something to address the exorbitant costs and 40% increases? To tell people that they're going to give them 25% relief on the bill that they've created—some bills have gone up between 200% and 400%. Telling me you're going to give me 25% just doesn't cut it.

Saugeen Cedars campground in my riding: Their bill went from \$8,000 a year to \$36,000 a year—for a seasonal campground. How do they ever recoup those types of costs from people? It's like another tax increase from the government. They have to go back to say, “Sorry about your luck, but if you want to camp here, we're going to jack your costs up.”

All of that is a result of their mismanagement and incompetence. They've overspent every year I've been here. They don't do anything about the debt. In fact, the deficit this year went up again, to \$12 billion—one of the largest expenditures on their side of the House, in the government. They spent more than all of the post-secondary sector on interest payments, which do absolutely nothing to help keep our hospitals open; keep our schools open; help our seniors in long-term care with all the needs they have.

According to the Ontario Energy Board, their hydro rates have climbed 81%, 18 cents per kilowatt hour, since November 2010. Those are those two small grocery stores. An 81% increase: How do they sustain that? Chesley Grocery Store's global adjustment was \$3,500, just for the month of March. In 2015, the Auditor General said that the global adjustment cost consumers \$37 billion from 2006 to 2014, and will cost an additional \$133 billion from 2015 to 2032. The report also noted that consumers will have to pay \$9.2 billion more for a renewable energy project over a 20-year contract for wind, solar and biomass than under a previous plan.

Mr. Speaker, they moved the goalposts out. They took their mortgage and said, “We're going to extend it out a number of years,” but they don't tell people it's going to cost them \$25 billion. These pages sitting in front of you are going to be the people, sadly, who are saddled with that debt so that they can just put it out and make it look like we've balanced the budget this year.

We still struggle. What we wanted to see was hydro rate reductions. We wanted to see them talk about school

closures: that they would put in a moratorium until we can go out and find solutions to keep these communities and these schools viable.

Hospitals are in significant challenge at this point. They've put some money in to say, "We've given money back to the hospitals," but they've capped them for four years. At the end of the day, if they're not keeping up, our hospitals will be like our school closures, which they start to target across rural Ontario.

I've mentioned already the \$12 billion they pay in interest. That's incredible. Think of what we could do for our schools, for our education system, for our long-term-care facilities and, more importantly, the services for those people if we had \$12 billion.

They've doubled the debt in their 14 years. It will soon be \$312 billion—again, at a time with the lowest interest rates we've ever had in our province's history. If they start to inch up even a bit, that's more money going to interest payments as opposed to front-line care for seniors, for students, for all of the great people of this great province.

It is not a balanced budget. There's a \$5-billion hole. They're still overspending, and it's simply unacceptable.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

M^{me} France Gélinas: It was really interesting listening to the member. I couldn't help but think of an article I just read recently from Charles Pascal. You will remember that he was a former Ontario deputy minister. He actually attended one of those community engagement meetings that has to take place before a school board can close a school. He attended one in Prince Edward county for the closure of a rural school. What he described in his article is exactly what is being played over and over and over in Nickel Belt. I will quote from him. He said, "I recall the constant cautionary refrain from northern and rural Ontario leaders about the one-size-fits-all solutions emanating from Queen's Park. Indeed, equity should not mean sameness."

The funding formula, the way those decisions are made to close rural schools is so, so detrimental to northern and rural schools, I can't tell you how much damage we are doing. I can talk about Naughton. Our Lady of Fatima was a beautiful school, kindergarten to grade 8. Actually, some of you will remember Rick Bartolucci. Rick Bartolucci was the principal at that school and it was packed: 400 and some students, and life was good. Our Lady of Fatima has been closed; right after that, the ice cream shop closed, then the chip stand, then the one and only community store. And now even the gas station is gone.

What happens in rural and northern Ontario when you take the school away? You hollow out our communities to the point where they will self-implode and nothing will be left. Is this really what we want? Is this really the legacy that the Liberals want: a whole bunch of rural Ontario self-imploding? I don't think so.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Yvan Baker: It's interesting to hear the member for the PC Party get up and speak about this issue. They keep trying to argue that we haven't balanced the budget even though we have. As someone who has worked in business, who has advised companies on how to invest their money, how to use their capital effectively, how to grow their business, I know a balanced budget when I see one. I've been part of helping to balance this budget, and I have to say this is a balanced budget.

In fact, on that note, there was an article in the Toronto Sun that I'd like to quote from. It's by David Reeverly—

Interjection.

Mr. Yvan Baker: This is Patrick Brown. "Mr. Speaker, it (has) a \$5-billion operational deficit through cash grabs, pension assets and one-time and unusual revenue," leader Patrick Brown charged in the Legislature, kicking off question period Monday morning. 'Will the Premier come clean and admit to the House the budget is not balanced?'" That was your leader.

David goes on to write, "Of course she would not. Because it's a stupid question."

Then he goes on later in the article, "In Ontario, the canonical example is in one of the later Progressive Conservative budgets when Ernie Eves was Premier. The 2001 budget booked \$2 billion in revenues from selling provincial assets that weren't named at the time. Most of the year went by without anybody's saying—maybe without the Tories' even knowing—what they might be. The government decided selling Hydro One would do it, set out to make the sale, and then choked. So the Tories had said they'd find \$2 billion somewhere, they didn't know where, and they ultimately failed to find it. That was a hole."

Even the Toronto Sun believes that the arguments being made by the PCs, by Patrick Brown, that we haven't balanced the budget are "stupid"—that's the word that's used here.

This is a balanced budget. I'm proud of how we've approached it. We didn't do it by slashing and burning the way the PCs did. We didn't get desperate and do what the PCs did in an election year and sell the 407 for a song and then use that to balance the budget. We did it in a thoughtful, methodical way.

I'm really proud of this budget. It invests in the priorities of Ontarians. We've balanced the budget and we've done it in a thoughtful way.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you, but yes, it is the convention that we try to adhere to that we refer to each other by our riding names, not our surnames or cabinet ministers' surnames.

Questions and comments?

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I'm pleased to rise to offer my comments on the speech by the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound.

It's interesting, we hear all kinds of arguments or talk about what's good and bad about this budget—and we'll be listening for a number of hours yet on different aspects of this budget—but it's really not newspapers

that I listen to in my riding, that I read these articles. It's the people in my riding who I listen to because they are the people who voted me into this position.

It was interesting, after the budget was brought out—and it's something that the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound alluded to. I go to lunch at the local army and navy club at the noon hour and there are usually 100 or so people there. It's very well attended, very good food, reasonably priced. That's why I go over there. I didn't get 10 feet in the door, and all I heard is, "What is this Premier trying to pull now?" This is the day after the budget was brought out. There were some people in my riding who were listening to this. They said, "How could she stand there—or how can the finance minister stand there—and claim this is a balanced budget when everybody knows that Hydro One was sold for this purpose, and what are we going to do in the coming years? What else are we going to sell?"

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People all over the army and navy club were just grinning about that, about how they can stand here and say, "We're going to have balanced budgets from now on." What are we going to continue to sell in this province? They point out that this Premier was not elected to sell Hydro One. Some 80% of the people of this province were very upset, and are very upset, about what's going on with Hydro One and the sale of it. So for the government to stand here and say that they have a balanced budget because of their remarkable fiscal responsibility is, really, what I would call a stretch goal.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Miss Monique Taylor: It has definitely been an interesting afternoon in the Legislature listening to the government, the Liberals, speak about their take on the budget, and then listening to the Conservatives' facts on the budget, or opinions on the budget. They both want to go back and forth talking about, "Well, you did this," and, "You did that." The Conservatives sold off the 407 to balance the budget, and the Liberals have sold off Hydro One to claim that they balanced the budget, and yet we still have lost our priorities in this province when it comes to the people of Ontario.

We know that we have children suffering in our province each and every day. We have kids with autism. We have 12,000 kids on a wait-list for mental health services. We have seniors who are waiting for long-term-care beds, and yet the government redevelops beds that are already there. Where are those profits going to go? Right into the pockets of the people who own those facilities. They don't maintain their beds, we're going to give them money to maintain their beds, and they're going to profit from our public dollars when we know we have 25,000 seniors waiting to get into long-term-care beds in Ontario.

For the government to be ruffling their own peacock feathers and talking about singing a dance of what a wonderful budget they've brought forward—I wonder if they actually speak to the people of this province, the

people who actually need the services that this government has been cutting back. They definitely like to campaign as the left, but they like to govern as the right. "Tories in a hurry" yet again with the Liberal government, and only the people of Ontario continue to suffer.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That, I believe, concludes our questions and comments for this round.

The member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound can reply now.

Mr. Bill Walker: I'd like to thank the member from Nickel Belt. She talked about school closures and she talked about the Premier who came into government, apparently, to stop school closures, and yet she's governing over the biggest number of schools ever closed in our province's history. I hope that is not a legacy she's proud of, but it is the legacy that she's creating.

The member from Etobicoke Centre always stands up. I like the member from there. He talks about being a business consultant, but, Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask him why the Auditor General, why the fiscal accountability officer—third-party officers of this Legislature—are challenging their numbers. They're calling it a shell game. I don't know how he can say he's proud of a budget that slashes this many schools. He talks about methodical means. I would suggest that that's a code word for a shell game and moving numbers. Part of "methodical" must have been, "We're going to sell Hydro One but we're not going to campaign; we're not going to come and knock on your door and tell you we're going to do that to balance our budget."

I hope he's not proud to burden, with this shell game, our children and grandchildren with debt. It is unconscionable. The pages sitting in front of you are going to wear the burden of this supposed balanced budget. The chief government whip was suggesting that I'm negative, Mr. Speaker, and I apologize. Most of my speech, sadly, has been of a negative slant, and that's partly because I don't look through rose-coloured glasses and try to snowball people and believe that everything is rosy. We have the highest debt in history. We have \$12 billion in interest payments every year we're paying which doesn't go to health care, doesn't go to education, doesn't go to the least fortunate in our ridings.

Our rural school closures and long-term-care beds that are abysmal, as we've talked about—my friend from Perth-Wellington said it right. He listens to the people in his riding, and what they're saying to him is, "Enough is enough." Life is too hard under these Liberals. We cannot trust the integrity of what they're saying. We cannot trust their numbers. This budget is not balanced in any way. You can spin numbers any way you want, but it is not a balanced budget truly, and it's not a sustainable balanced budget.

The member from Hamilton Mountain suggested a number of things, but I'm just going to ask how they voted on budgets in the first two elections that I was here for, because they enabled the Liberals to stay in power,

and some of the pain we're feeling today is because of that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm glad to finally have my opportunity to speak in this fine Legislature, on behalf of the people from Oshawa, on Bill 127, which is An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact, amend and repeal various statutes.

We've been talking a lot about the budget, but this particular bill is called the Stronger, Healthier Ontario Act. I'll tell you, Speaker, I've said it before, but I'm always so impressed by the titles to the bills that the government offers. The Stronger, Healthier Ontario Act: There are so many wonderful things that one would expect from this bill, but, sadly, alas, many of the things you would anticipate and expect when you think of a stronger, healthier Ontario are missing. They're absent from this bill. Anyway, we'll get into that, because I have a full 20 minutes. I would never want to share my time, Speaker. I'm glad to have the full 20 to dedicate to this fine topic.

One of the things I wanted to start with, when we think about a stronger, healthier Ontario—I'm a little biased. I come out of public education, so I'm going to start there. I'm going to start focusing on education in this province. We fundamentally, if you'll pardon the pun, need to look at the funding of our education system here in the province. I think it's a debate that we need to have as a province, and certainly as members of this Legislature, but we need to be talking about it in our communities. When we hear from the government, we hear about how "stable" and "supported" and "safe" and "flexible"—and all sorts of other fun buzzwords about public education. But when we hear from our community members, when we hear from our students, we hear a different story. So one of the things I really wish we had seen in the budget was appropriate funding for education, really looking at it holistically and putting the money where it needs to be to address a lot of the issues.

We've been talking about northern and rural schools. We've heard a lot about school closures, and I'll tell you that, in Oshawa, one of our only south-end high schools, Central, was unfortunately closed. Now we just have one school in the south and one high school. And you know what? I had a meeting with some of my young constituents, some grade 11 students. They scheduled an appointment—and you know the government's in trouble when 16-year-olds are making appointments with their MPP to sit down and discuss public education funding. They came to talk to me about the realities in their world. These were university-bound students from the south end of Oshawa, which report after report suggests is a very high-needs area, with very high poverty rates, low youth employment and high rates of youth homelessness. But these were some students who were in grade 11, and they were wanting to pursue academic classes, university-bound classes, to get to university. That's their plan.

Unfortunately, with the cuts in funding and the realities—their enrolment is dropping, and because our

funding is based on enrolment, they were faced with the reality that they wouldn't be able to take any of those classes. Those classes wouldn't be offered at their high school. The only high school in the south end of Oshawa was faced with the reality that they couldn't afford to offer these courses because there weren't enough students to fill them. We've been working that out, but again, it was a reality that that school in my community was faced with. I know it's happening in northern and rural communities that don't have the numbers.

We talk about school closures, but what happens up and until that point? Up and until we're faced with closing the school, we're starving the students of those opportunities. We're having to cut classes. I was talking to someone who said, "You know, there are schools across the province that, in all likelihood, don't offer university-bound courses at all." I throw that challenge out there. I'd love to hear from some of those schools because I think that's a bigger part of the conversation that we're not having—students who want and are seeking those opportunities. They need to be there. We as a province and we as a Legislature need to say, "Okay, we will ensure that every student has a pathway in front of them." Every student needs to reach their full potential, whomever we're talking about, whatever child we're talking about, wherever they live—north of the Liberal snow fence that they like to pretend doesn't exist, or in the GTA, or anywhere in between.

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I'm sticking with education because that's where I feel most passionate, I would say. One thing, again, that was missing was the focus on safety. We've been talking about that. We've been talking about students being safe on the way to school: whether it's the hour or hour-and-a-half bus rides because they've closed their schools; whether we're talking about four-year-olds on the bus, to and from school—in the winter, in the dark both ways. How do we expect them to become lifelong learners and be enthusiastic when that's the situation?

I want to talk about other kindergarten children in my area, in Durham region. I have a letter here from a teacher who teaches kindergarten. The government speaks very proudly about all-day, full-day kindergarten. There are things to be proud of; there are things to be pleased with. But if you're going to institute a program and not appropriately support it or re-evaluate it and make sure it is operating the way it should, then we have a problem. This teacher said:

"I am concerned about the level of safety in my classroom. I have students on a daily basis running around and out of the room, destroying and trashing the classroom and disrupting the learning environment of my classroom. Students are getting hit, kicked, pinched, scratched, taunted because the behaviours cannot be dealt with in a timely fashion, or at all. The" special education resource teacher "is busy running around tending to emergencies or dealing with behaviours to help admin ... more time is needed observing the behaviours and conferencing with teachers to build next steps to get students

support and help that they need. Administration is busy on a daily basis running around dealing with behaviour and emergencies and often there is no one to come from the office to help in all areas of need.... Incidents are not being reported because teachers are stressed, overwhelmed and many do not get ... any breaks.... It sounds terrible, I know, but there really is not enough support in order to maintain it all. Students ... are taken out of the classrooms and then later put right back in. Admin says it's progressive discipline, but the behaviours just escalate because students are not held accountable for their actions. Teachers are telling me they are tired and they are exhausted and they are giving up ... losing hope."

Speaker, does this sound like a supportive learning environment to you? Does this sound like we're putting the money where it needs to go? Because this is one of many conversations I've had and many letters I've had.

Our local papers have done a couple of articles—and I have one here—on violence in the schools. This is from an article on April 20:

"Violence in some Durham schools has reached a point where teachers are issued Kevlar jackets or hoodies to deal with aggressive children and classrooms are regularly evacuated or locked up when a child has a meltdown."

It goes on to discuss different situations, parents coming forward, children stressed and in danger. Obviously, it doesn't have solutions, because that's what we're here to do. We need to talk about ways forward to protect and support our children.

There are more comments here from the president of the local teachers' federation of Durham. He says that they have many "reports from Durham teachers reporting violence including being bitten, kicked, punched, stomped, spit on, verbally assaulted and stabbed with objects like scissors.

"He says many of the reports involved primary-aged children with some as young as kindergarteners."

Remember, we've got three-, four- and five-year-olds in our schools without the appropriate supports that they need to reach their full potential. We're not doing all we can and we're not having the right conversations.

I've already brought forward two examples: (1) the 16-year-old students who just want to further their education and have a pathway in front of them; and (2) four-year-olds who are learning in an unsupported, often predictably unsafe learning environment. That's inappropriate.

It goes on to say—here are some stats of teachers: Of 700 teachers who responded to a survey about safety, "just 24% said that they never felt unsafe at work while 70% responded"—wait, hold on. Let me read that again.

"Asked how often they felt unsafe at work, just 24% said never"—good—"while 70% responded sometimes and almost 6% said always." That's a lot of people saying that they always feel unsafe at work, any workplace—and we're talking about our public education system; we're talking about our classrooms.

You know what? I'm going to move on because—well, good—I've spent 10 full minutes talking about safety in our schools, and I'm glad to finally give that voice because, Lord knows, the government isn't going to bring it up and talk about it. But I will get back to some of these issues.

I've had the opportunity to talk about education. I would like to pick up the actual bill itself and go through some of these. There are 33 schedules in this bill, Speaker—lots of potential for conversation, so I don't want to waste the opportunity. Here's one that's brief: Schedule 12 is the Forest Fires Prevention Act. There are a couple of little changes in here. This is a really specific one, but I just thought it was worth the conversation.

There's a section that would expand liability and would also hold railway companies liable for forest fires that originate within 15 metres of rail line operations. Good, I would say. There are a few more specifics, but why am I mentioning that? I'm mentioning that because my colleague from Nickel Belt reminded us with a petition today, but has been relentlessly bringing this forward to the government, about the folks and community of Gogama. It was over two years ago, March 2015, that over 1.2 million litres of crude ended up in the Makami River. We have been calling on this government to push CN, to encourage them to do the cleanup. It's their cleanup to do.

So when I see something tucked in the budget about holding railway companies liable for forest fires that originate within 15 metres of rail line operations, I'm not arguing; that sounds like a fine plan. But how about a plan also to make them clean up the mess, encourage them to clean up the mess they have made, which two years later we're still dealing with? Just saying, if you're putting it in writing to hold the railway companies responsible, let's actually hold them responsible.

There's schedule 23: This is an environmental section, the Oil, Gas and Salt Resources Act. Without getting too far into the polluted weeds here, this is something that, when our research team met with ministry staff and had an understanding of what the government's intention was with this—there is no reference to obtaining free, prior and informed consent of First Nations before approving licences or permits. That was a problem. Also, the provisions of this schedule haven't been posted on the Environmental Registry, which seems to circumvent the public's right to participate in environmental decision-making as described in the Environmental Bill of Rights. Speaker, I couldn't possibly imagine that the government would want to circumvent public input, so they might want to go back and make that change.

But also, one of the changes they made—this current section 19 of the act prohibits waste from oil and gas activities that result in:

- "(i) a hazard to public safety, or
- "(ii) pollution of the natural environment...."

So schedule 23 is similar to what is already there. However, it does not specifically prohibit pollution of the natural environment with respect to these new, as-of-yet-

unidentified activities. They still have the first part in there about “a hazard to public safety” but, by design, they have taken out the second part that protects the natural environment. Why? We have some wonderful natural environment in Oshawa, and I would hate to think that it would ever be at risk because of an omission. I’m just pointing it out to them. They can always go back and change that, I’m sure.

The Pension Benefits Act is another section, schedule 27, that the government is making some changes to. Essentially, this makes legislation that corresponds to several processes that are already under way, including an MOU signed by some of the parties to the creditor protection process. The CCAA process is winding down and we have a situation under way where the government is sort of—I won’t say this legislation mirrors that but is necessary legislation. But I have thoughts on this, and that is that if the government is going to open up the Pension Benefits Act and make any kind of useful changes, again, this is a missed opportunity. They could have, at the very least, even made changes to the Pension Benefits Guarantee Fund, or the PBGF. It was set up in 1980 to ensure that if a company goes under and a pension plan is wound up, pensioners aren’t left bearing the full brunt of that impact. As it stands now under the current system, it would cover up to \$1,000 per month in lost benefit for a worker. Back in 2008, Mr. Harry Arthurs had recommended that it be increased to \$2,500 instead of \$1,000, and at that point, that was to make up the difference in the cost of living. Here we are now nine years later; I wonder what that number would be?

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Why I’m bringing this up is that, as schedule 27 opens up the Pension Benefits Act, couldn’t they have increased it to the cost of living, the PBGF amount? You know, it might not be the exciting story that the government would be looking for, but it is an important part of the bigger picture. My colleague from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek has brought forward a private member’s bill twice, so it’s not like this is an idea that the government hadn’t been aware of. So, again, it’s a missed opportunity at the very least.

Schedule 33 is the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997. They went in and have made some changes, long-sought changes from our partners in labour. We support them. But this schedule excludes “mental stress caused by decisions or actions of the worker’s employer relating to the worker’s employment, including a decision to change the work to be performed or the working conditions, to discipline the worker or to terminate the employment.” So this change addresses chronic or traumatic mental stress arising out of and in the course of the worker’s employment, but—here’s that asterisk—not under these circumstances. Well, either you care or you don’t; either you cover them or you don’t. Again, this entitlement is being limited, and I would say needlessly.

We used to have a compensation system—this was the great compromise, right?—such that if a worker was injured, that there would be fair compensation. And

that’s so far from where we have landed, because now we have bits and parts. We have a system now that is not about compensation; it’s begging for scraps and it is a system without dignity anymore. We as a province need to say, “Do we care about looking after those who are injured, maimed, hurt or made ill on the job? Yes or no?” And if the answer is that, yes, we do care, then we have to put our money where our mouth is. We have to actually make this system accessible to them and support them.

Oh, good, I still have two and a half minutes.

One of the other things I’d like to share, because we’ve been talking a lot about health care, about pharmacare—well, actually, that’s not entirely true. On this side of the House, we’ve been talking about universal pharmacare. On that side of the House, they’ve been talking about junior drug plans. Covering our youth is important, absolutely, but so is covering their parents.

When you talk about the cliff that is turning 25—think about milestones. It’s interesting now to imagine the landscape. When you think about a child now growing up, when they’re 16, they think about driving; at 18, voting; at 19, maybe, should they be so inclined, legally drinking; at 21, visiting the States and doing the same. Then, when they hit 25, losing their drug coverage—what a thing to look forward to, and disappointing.

I’m going to read a letter that I got from a woman in my community. She said, “I’m a 32-year-old Ontarian, born and raised. I earn less than \$24,000 a year. I am in a job that does not offer any type of benefit plan, and when paying for rent, car, phone, grocery and student debt, you can only imagine there is nothing left for extras. When I heard of the pharmacy care plan for people under 25 I was, well”—I’m going to change her word to make it parliamentary; ticked “off. I have asthma, IBS, anxiety and depression, GERD, and have just been diagnosed with a heart problem as well. So you may ask how I afford the medications I need. The ... answer is I can’t. When Ontarians are putting prescription medication on their credit cards, we have a big problem. Where is the help for people like me, when a puffer can cost \$50 to refill? I’m paying \$50 to breathe! It’s disgusting. I have to ask for samples when I go to the clinic. I have to ration out some of my meds for when I’m feeling really bad. Tell me how that makes Ontario great? You will charge me interest on a student loan, a loan that I had to take out so that I can hopefully get a better paying job, but I’ll be too sick to go to work.”

You know what? That kind of sums it up. It’s a shame that someone like that won’t have access to this government’s junior drug plan. But under a universal—which means “everybody in”—pharmacare plan, she and everybody else absolutely would. I think that’s not only the conversation that we need to have but that’s the plan that we need to move forward with.

With that, I’m out of time. Thank you, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Yvan Baker: It’s a pleasure to respond to the member from Oshawa. I really enjoy working with the

member from Oshawa; I think she works hard. But I have to point out that I disagree with her on what she said, particularly near the tail end of her remarks, around the pharmacare program.

We've done a number of things to help people in the circumstances of the constituent that she was referring to. For example, now it's going to be 210,000 students who are going to benefit from the new OSAP, so 210,000 students will get free tuition across Ontario. But also, those students who have OSAP loans currently now no longer—you used to have to pay them back when you had \$25,000 in income. We've now increased that to \$35,000 in income. So that will provide tremendous relief, on their costs of living, to people who are in the circumstances that the member opposite was talking about.

The other thing to talk about with regard to pharmacare is that this OHIP+ plan is very exciting because it doesn't just help those young people who are under 25. Of course, it directly helps them because their prescription drugs will be covered, but it also helps their families because, ultimately, in most of those cases, the pharmaceuticals, the prescription drugs, are paid for by the parents of the young person. So this is something that really helps everybody, but it obviously very substantially helps the young person who's in that situation.

I understand the NDP would prefer to have a plan that has 125 drugs covered—versus the 4,400 that we've tried to focus on—that would cover people across all ages, but a little bit. We've really focused on young people so that they can get the best start in life, so they can pursue that education that the member was talking about. We also are helping them with their cost of living so they can pursue the quality of life that they deserve.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bill Walker: It's always a pleasure to follow my friend from Oshawa. I enjoy serving with her, and she does bring a lot of good points to the Legislature.

One thing she said, though—I think she used the word “extras” in there. With this budget, I'm not certain that there were extras, because I'm not certain they are actually even providing many of the essentials that we need out here.

The member from Etobicoke Centre just talked about free tuition. If we didn't have a \$12-billion deficit that they're paying interest on, how many people would truly get free tuition? If they balanced, why are they still going to close 300 schools? Why did they not change the funding formula, which they promised in two elections?

At the end of the day most people in any riding say, “I want the government to come out and say what they are going to do, to make commitments, but follow through.” They said they would change the funding formula in two elections, and they have failed to do that. They have not even attempted to do anything with that.

If they truly balanced the budget and have no concerns with what they're doing, why will they not reinstate the actual community impact component, going forward, in

any other ARC reviews, which we've asked them for over and over and over? Many of the schools in ridings like Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound are single-community schools, where they are devastating a community because they are not consolidating schools; they're taking the only school out, which decimates that community.

If they have a balanced budget, why were there no dollars allotted to long-term-care beds when they know that there are 26,500 people on a waiting list? Why are there no new beds, Mr. Speaker? They keep talking about redevelopment; that's not helping the 26,500 people sitting on a wait-list.

If they had balanced, where is this \$5 billion coming from next year? Will they come out and tell us today where the \$5 billion is next year, when Hydro One sales are gone and the sales of OPG and LCBO are gone and they can't use pension assets, which the Auditor General said?

Mr. Speaker, we still have significant challenges with a budget like this that will not be able to continue to support.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I, too, enjoy listening to the member from Oshawa. She comes from a teaching background and certainly was able to share comments that make it clear that we have to do better for our kids in our schools. When teachers feel at risk, when teachers feel threatened, nothing good comes of this. Everybody deserves a safe workplace. That includes nurses, I will say on this nurses' week, but it also includes every worker, which includes all of our teachers.

She talked about what happened in Gogama two years ago. On March 7, a CP train derailed. It fell into the Makami River and spilled 1.2 million litres of crude. That year, in 2015, CN was there at the site and they cleaned up as best they could, till winter came and four feet of ice came over the river and they couldn't do anything. The next spring, the spring of 2016, as soon as the ice came off the river, there was oil everywhere. You could see it, you could smell it—it was everywhere. It took us seven months to convince the government to tell CN to come and continue the cleanup. This doesn't cost the government anything. It is CN that made the mess. It is CN that needs to clean up the mess. But it took seven months to convince the government that this was the right thing to do.

So when we read in the budget that they are going to hold train companies accountable for fires that the railway track causes, allow me to be a bit skeptical about this, because I have seen what a train derailment looks like, and I have seen our government missing in action to get the cleanup.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. James J. Bradley: At budget time, it's always interesting to hear opposition members, including the member for Oshawa. I must confess today, I don't think I

complimented too many budgets of either the NDP or the Conservatives, so I forgive my friend Bill on the other side for being negative, because I was probably negative when I was in opposition.

There's much to be positive about in this. The member comes from the education field, as I do. I was really pleased to see a very significant increase in funding, both in terms of capital and operating, contained in this budget. One of the criticisms that we get, particularly from the right wing, is, "Well, there are fewer students in the system, so why are you spending, on a continuing basis, more money in education?" I think the member, having been in education more recently than I, recognizes that because there are significant changes that have evolved over the years in education, the kind of targeted spending and increased spending that we see is justified.

I can also talk a bit about the difference between being in opposition and government, because I spent longer in opposition than I did in government. I remember, for instance, the NDP in Saskatchewan. They had a pretty good government. Roy Romanow was a great person. Dr. Janice MacKinnon was Minister of Finance. I read her book, *Minding the Public Purse*. She talked about when they had to close 52 hospitals in the province of Saskatchewan. They didn't do it to be mean. Just as the last time Ontario had an NDP government, they didn't make those cuts in the field of education and health care to be mean. They did it because they were facing a set of challenging circumstances.

We fortunately, at this time, are moving out of the very difficult period of time—

Interjection.

Mr. James J. Bradley: Mike Harris, by the way, inherited a good economy from the NDP, as the interjection comes.

We have a growing economy, which is allowing us to do a lot of things that are good for the province, and I'm pleased with that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our questions and comments.

The member for Oshawa can now respond.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I appreciate the thoughtful comments from my colleagues around the room: from Etobicoke Centre, Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, Nickel Belt and St. Catharines.

A couple points of clarification, starting with the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound: I did not say there were extras in the budget. It was a line from a letter I received that I used the term "extras." They were saying that with "rent, car, phone, grocery, and student debt, you can only imagine that there is nothing left for extras." I did not say that there were fun things to find in the budget that were extra.

But also, I wanted to say to the member from Etobicoke Centre talking about those youth under 25, that this junior drug plan the government is proposing will somehow help their parents, who, as likely as not, would be paying for those drugs otherwise—that's interesting. I think it would also be a help to their parents if we would

cover their pharmacare needs but also if we would talk about affordable housing options so that their under-25-year-olds could—I don't know—do something crazy like make plans to move out or to find an apartment, if we had inventory of low-income housing, if there were any options when it came to buying a first home, other than just pipe dreams. So if we're going to talk about helping families and helping those youth, let's have that conversation, but let's make it a real one.

Then, to the member from St. Catharines, I got a little tangled in what you were saying about what was justified when it came to targeted spending and under-enrolment. I'm not necessarily arguing what you said: I just didn't quite follow. My point was that in the last high school in south Oshawa that remains open, there's under-enrolment and therefore now not enough funding to even cover these university-bound courses. So we're shifting and moving things and making creative solutions that are not sustainable. These are children who deserve pathways, and that should be our priority.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I'm very honoured to stand here today and speak on Bill 127, which is the implementation bill for the budget that the government introduced, which helps us to build a stronger and healthier Ontario.

I speak today in the role that is the most important to me, and that is to represent the community of Ottawa Centre. As their member of provincial Parliament, it's my honour to serve in this Legislature and to speak about things that are important to my community every single day.

In simple words, I am supporting this budget because it speaks to things that are important to my community of Ottawa Centre. It speaks to things that I hear from my constituents when I go to their doors every weekend, as I just did this past Saturday, and ask them what's important to them.

Time and time again, my constituents tell me that they want their government to invest in things that are essential to them. What are those things? Our health care system, our education system, our infrastructure that particularly helps public transit: Those are the things that my community in Ottawa Centre are very keen on. As I pore through this budget document, which I have done, I see a strong emphasis on investments in our health care system, investments in education for our children and investments in infrastructure such as public transit.

There are many references to things that are happening in Ottawa and things that will be coming for Ottawa which are exciting to me personally, but are also endorsed by my constituents who live in the great community of Ottawa Centre.

I will start first with the balanced budget. I can tell you, Speaker, as I canvassed in my riding, as I did in the last election, one of the things that I did hear from my constituents on a regular basis was that they do want the provincial government to balance its books. They recognized that a deficit had to be incurred, that money

had to be borrowed, because of the great recession. There was clear recognition and continues to be the recognition in my community that we had to borrow money because of the devastating impact of the great recession, the largest recession since the Great Depression in the 1930s. Government had to be proactive in terms of stimulating the economy, and they supported that borrowing to stimulate economies, to be investing in our schools and our hospitals, in our community centres and our public transit, which resulted in the creation of hundreds of thousands of jobs across the province. In my city of Ottawa alone, that borrowing resulted in not only keeping our hospitals and our schools operating—in fact, growing—but also significant investments in our community centres like in Hintonburg, where we renovated the entire basement of the community centre and made more spaces available; as we did in rehabilitating Hintonburg Park—I was just there last weekend for the Happening festival in Ottawa; that park has become a huge hub for the community to come together—and as we did by investing in building two new buildings, the River Building and the Canal Building, at Carleton University, which is located in Ottawa Centre and which I know, Speaker, your two sons attend as well. It's a fine, fine institution. Those two buildings are just marquee buildings that were built as a result of that seamless funding, creating better learning spaces for our young people.

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I can go on with the list of investments we made, but what it resulted in was not only creating better places to live and to learn in my community of Ottawa Centre, but also it helped stimulate our economy. When I talk with many friends that I have in the building trades, they are thankful for those investments because they kept them in business and made sure that they had a good livelihood that they were able to then reinvest in our economy, and not only them, but other professionals and other service providers in our economy as well.

The negative effect of that borrowing to stimulate the economy so that we can come out of the great recession is that we had a fairly significant deficit, a deficit of over \$19 billion. The government said some time ago that we will balance our books by 2017-18, but we're going to do so in a prudent way. We're going to do it in a manner that does not impact the key things that are important to our communities: health care and education.

By sheer hard work and that commitment we made to Ontarians and that we articulated in the last provincial election, I'm very happy and proud that we are at that moment where we are able to balance our budget. We are able to balance the budget because we made prudent decisions in terms of growing our economy. We made prudent decisions in terms of the services we provide by keeping our focus on things that are important to people, like health care and education.

Also, that investment resulted in the economy growing, which is paying dividends, because we have more people working now, more people are paying taxes and there is more investment that is taking place in Ontario.

This province is an amazing destination to invest in and to do business in. We're seeing the result of all that in this great economy that is growing, that is outpacing the G7 countries and outpacing other provinces in Canada.

I'm happy that my constituents kept my feet to the fire in making sure that we do balance the budget. I am really proud to report back to my constituents in Ottawa Centre that we have accomplished that task. We have achieved that task and we see a path where the balance will remain for the next few years to come.

Let me move on to issues that are important and that I'll highlight. I'll start with investments in health care, which are extremely important, because at the end of the day, no matter who you speak to—a young family or a retired senior or anybody in between—they will tell you that their number one priority is good delivery of health care. They want to make sure that the health care system is there when they need it.

We can have political differences on what we think about various initiatives in this budget, but I think in our hearts we'll all agree that the introduction of OHIP+ pharmacare—a universal pharmacare program for our children and youth aged under 25 for all drugs that are available as part of OHIP—is a game-changer. You may think that this does not go far enough or you may think that it's gone too far. The fact of the matter is, in all frankness, this is a game-changer. We have never had this, Speaker. This is a significant step in protecting and providing universal health care in a true fashion for the most vulnerable in our society, and that is our children and our youth. By covering all kids from zero to 25 and under, in terms of all medication, is a very significant step. It's a step that we've announced and we will be taking starting January 1 that has caught the attention of the entire country, not just in Ontario. Coast to coast to coast, including the federal government, everybody's talking about it.

As I am out in my community, since the budget was announced, this is one thing where people have come up to me and said, "Bravo. Well done, this was needed, this is important. I hope this is the beginning of ensuring that we truly have universal health care and universal pharmacare." My response to them is, absolutely.

You know what? We wanted to start somewhere. You can talk about it and you can put a grand vision out, which is important, but we wanted to take a practical step and we have taken that step. We decided that our priority is going to be children and youth to start with, and hopefully by working with other partners in this Legislature and by working with federal government, we may be able to expand it to everyone. But let's start somewhere. The fact that we are doing the OHIP+ pharmacare is remarkable. Maybe I'm speaking as a parent of two very young children. I am quite excited about it, and I continue to hear positive feedback.

People ask me, is it really true that it will be available January 1, 2018? Absolutely. Is it really true that there's going to be no hidden costs? Absolutely. Is it really true that there are going to be no copayments or no deductibles? Absolutely true.

In fact, some of the smaller businesses who look after their employees and have health insurance plans have come to me. They're excited because they see some savings coming their way, because now they would have to pay, hopefully, fewer premiums as a result. The benefit goes on and on. In many instances, in fact, some small businesses told me they don't cover everything in the health plans for their employees' children, or there is a significant deductible. That assists their workforce and it makes their workforce even that much stronger and healthier, to be able to help build our economy.

The other important aspect from my view is investment in our hospitals. I was with my colleagues from Ottawa at the Ottawa heart institute, which is located in my riding of Ottawa Centre, announcing that we will be investing \$35.9 million per year for our Ottawa hospitals—the Ottawa hospital, the heart institute and Bruyère continuing care, which is also located in my riding. We have the Hôpital Montfort, we have CHEO, the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario, and we have Queensway Carleton Hospital. All those partners were present. They see this investment as a very important investment. Anywhere from 2% or 3% increased funding in the base operating funds will result in them reducing their waitlists and being able to provide improved services to our residents in Ottawa, a very important aspect of this.

I've also heard from my community health sector side. I got an e-mail both from the executive director of the Centretown Community Health Centre, Simone Thibault, and the executive director of the Somerset West Community Health Centre, Naini Cloutier. Both of these community health centres are located in my riding, both are saying bravo on OHIP+ pharmacare, on investments that we have for the community health sector and for allied workers that will see an increase in compensation. They both wrote unsolicited emails to me saying that the government is taking the right direction. I want to thank them for the great work they do, along with their staff in providing essential important services to our constituents.

I want to move towards education again, a very important aspect of building our economy and making sure that our children have the base, the great foundation in place. We are very lucky to live in Ontario, where we have one of the best education systems in the world, and I will make that claim because that claim is true. Every ranking we see around the world—PISA comes to mind—continues to demonstrate how well we do in Ontario. I think we should be excited about that: We compete on a global scale when it comes to our public education system.

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We have a great foundation to continue to build from, from kindergarten all the way to PhD, because our greatest asset, our natural resource in this province—and I've said this before—is our talent, is our people. The best way to nourish that and to build that is to invest in our education.

When I see that in our school system we are investing an additional \$1 billion, almost \$1 billion to base funding

for our schools, even though enrolment numbers are down, it's heartwarming. For the first time, per pupil funding has now topped \$12,000 per pupil. How incredible is that, Speaker? I see my five-year-old son, Rafi, who goes to junior kindergarten. The kind of care and education he is getting and the excitement that I see in him—he goes to a local school, St. Augustine—is just amazing. I'm just one parent. I was just with him at the muffin breakfast party at the school last Friday, and all parents were just absolutely thrilled with the kind of education they're getting in our education system.

I'm really excited that we are capping full-day kindergarten. Maybe I'm a little selfish because my son is in full-day kindergarten. I think that is a very important move. The fact that we'll be capping enrolment for grades 4 to 8 is a very progressive move. We will continue to make these very important investments that matter to parents, that matter to our children.

I can go on and on about child care and the investments in building new child care: 24,000 spaces just this year across the province. Many of them are going to be in Ottawa. Making sure that those places are accessible and affordable by way of subsidies is also just an incredible investment. That speaks to the theme of building a stronger, healthier Ontario. It really speaks to how we're investing where it matters the most, which is our children and our youth.

We're seeing a similar investment in our post-secondary institutions. I think that one cannot undermine the new OSAP and what it really means when it comes to giving an opportunity for young people who come from a low-income background. They should have the same opportunity to succeed. There should be no discrimination in our system whatsoever. Just because you come from a well-to-do family, yes, you get to go to university or college, but if you come from low income, sorry, you may be able to do well, but because you can't pay, you can't afford that. Well, Speaker, that's not the kind of society that we have signed on to.

If you look at reports like the poverty reduction report or the Pascal report on full-day learning or if you look at the roots of violence report that was done, it all talks about breaking the cycle of poverty. It focuses so much on initiatives that governments can take to say that those who are poor should not be subjected to poverty, that we need to ensure that we break that cycle. There is no better way to break the cycle of poverty than by investing in education, by creating a level playing field and giving that opportunity to those kids who come from low-income families and to say, "You know what? You can go to school as well. You can go to college or university as well and get the same education and be the first one in your family to do so and build a better life." We know: Study after study has shown that when one child goes to post-secondary education, to college or university, most likely, their children will do the same thing. You start turning their fate.

So that's what we're doing with the new OSAP. We are creating that exact opportunity. I think it's exciting. I

continue to meet with people like Cheryl Jensen, who's the president of Algonquin College, and she keeps telling me how exciting this is; or my president, Dr. Roseann O'Reilly Runte at Carleton University, who will be leaving Carleton soon to go to another exciting job, and we wish her the best of luck in that—how exciting that proposition is.

I actually had a meeting with a child and youth counsellor from CHEO, Gilles Charron, and we were talking about the kind of services provided. We started talking about this change. He said, "I knew a little bit about it, but not in detail." Right away, he started identifying students that he knows, or young people he is working with, who are just starting to make changes from homelessness and from some mental health issues or addiction issues they've been dealing with, and they can take a course or two at Algonquin or La Cité or maybe at Carleton University or University of Ottawa—but they may not be able to afford to do so. He says that this is the kind of thing that, through the OHIP program, they will be able to do. Imagine, Speaker, the opportunity that we can give to those young people, which is part of this budget and a commitment from this government that will be available starting this September.

Speaker, the last thing I want to talk about—and there's so much that I can discuss—is investment in our infrastructure, be it building new hospitals, hospitals like we're doing by building a whole new extension, over \$200 million, to the University of Ottawa Heart Institute, which is a global institution. It does incredible research and provides the most incredible cardiac care. That construction of a new tower is ongoing, and it should actually be open by April 2018, as I was just recently informed. That's a brand new surgery room, state-of-the-art, that is amazing, not only for Ottawa, but all the surrounding communities in Ottawa, the valley, the eastern part of Ontario. Those are important services.

Or, as we saw in education—investments in building a brand new school, the Broadview Public School in my community of Westboro, a beautiful new school. It replaced an old school from 1927 in a downtown urban community. You can see the vibrancy that has come back in that school and the programming that they are offering in that school.

Those are important infrastructure investments, and we see once again a very strong commitment on the part of the provincial government as part of this stronger, healthier Ontario budget—a balanced budget, Speaker—that will continue with those important investments.

The one investment that is close to my heart is investment in our light rail system in Ottawa. We know that the Confederation Line is on time and on budget, Speaker. The province invested \$600 million. It builds the spine right in my community of Ottawa Centre, to the downtown core. It has a subway part in the downtown core. But the government has also committed—and it's referenced in this budget, which I fully endorse—an investment of over a billion dollars in the second phase of the LRT, as well, that will go further east, all the way

to Trim Road in Ottawa–Orléans, further south to the Ottawa airport in Ottawa South, and further south in Nepean–Carleton and then west in Ottawa West–Nepean. We really start to see an incredible LRT system. The Ontario government has committed over a billion dollars for that important infrastructure, because not only will it help create jobs, but it really links our city to our universities, to our colleges, to our downtown, to the new Innovation Centre in which the province invested \$15 million, from our airport to the downtown. You really start to see how that's not only going to improve our quality of life but also going to enhance our economy.

Speaker, this budget, from my perspective, is a good budget. It's a good budget for Ottawa. I will be supporting this for all the reasons I just outlined, and I hope other members do the same.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I'm pleased to rise to comment on the remarks made by the member from Ottawa Centre. He spoke about improvements to the education system and what they're doing in the education system. He spoke about different things in health care.

But you know what's going to destroy health care and education—and it's helping to do it now—is this increasing debt that the government persists in running. They are addicted to running debts; it's a real addiction. It's too bad that there wasn't a pill in this new drug program they've brought out that they could take to make them stop running these debts, because it's going to have to be paid back sometime. It's going to have to happen. You're spending almost \$12 billion a year to service this debt, and yet you keep increasing it all the time.

Don't believe me when I say that this is a false balanced budget; it's my constituents who are telling me this. I think I told you this story, about going to the Legion for lunch the other day, and they're saying, "What is this government trying to pull over our heads? We don't believe it at all. We can see what's going on. They've sold assets in order to balance the budget. Well, what are we going to do next year? We haven't got that asset anymore."

For them to come out and try to fool the public into believing that they are great stewards of their money—and that's whose it is; it's our taxpayers' money—to me is not fooling the general public. We've seen this from commentary in newspapers and we've seen it from commentary from radio stations that we listen to, that they're not fooling anybody but themselves.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

M^{me} France Gélinas: It was interesting listening to the member from Ottawa Centre when he talked about one of his constituents that he had been talking to, where they figure that with the seventh drug program that they have introduced, for kids zero to 24, there would be fewer premiums to be paid to the insurance companies of the parents who do have a drug plan. I am curious to see:

How do they intend to make sure that that \$450 million doesn't go directly into the pockets of those insurance companies? What are you going to put into place to make sure that, actually, the consumer sees those savings, given that you only cover children? I'm curious to see. I'm happy to see that the member has mentioned that they intend to pass on those savings that the insurance companies are going to make back to the consumers and the employers. I'm curious to see how this will happen.

Same thing: One of the cornerstones of pharmacare is that you can negotiate better drug prices. It's as simple as that. You look to the States, you look to Sweden, you look to kiwi land—I forget the name.

Interjection: New Zealand.

M^{me} France Gélinas: New Zealand, thank you. That was really impolite to New Zealand.

They're all able to negotiate to the tune of 67% cheaper than us. Why? Because they started with a list. Why? Because they built the infrastructure that was going to allow them to take advantage of the purchasing power when a government purchases for 14 million Ontarians. None of this is going to be available with the seventh drug plan that they're putting forward.

He then talked about breaking the cycle of poverty. We all agree that you break it through education. But when you put little kids on a bus from Geneva Lake to Chelmsford, an hour and a half one way, you're not encouraging this kid to go to school; you are encouraging this kid to quit school.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Yvan Baker: I want to thank the member for Ottawa Centre, our government House leader, for his thoughtful remarks in talking about how the budget is going to touch his community. I think that much of what he said is something that we all feel on this side of the House. The things that he talked about, whether it be health care, education or how we're helping students through this budget, are things that will touch people in all of our communities. I think that's really worth taking note of.

I did want to also speak to something that the member for the PC Party said in response to the member for Ottawa Centre. When he talks about—I think he used the words “addicted to deficits.” Well, we're not addicted to deficits. We just balanced the budget. The deficit is zero. In fact, we're going to balance the budget not just this year, but next year and the year after.

To have that party lecture us on fiscal management—when they were in office, they had unprecedented growth in the Ontario economy. They enjoyed years of prosperity that no government has enjoyed for many years. During that time, they managed to cut taxes and run deficits most of those years and, in desperation to balance the budget, sold off the 407. So for him to lecture me about the selling of assets I think is a little rich.

I also want to say—he talked about us being a threat to health care. I would like to ask the real PC Party to stand up. Is the PC Party saying that we should invest in health

care and education? Or is the PC Party saying no: cut spending, lower taxes like they did under Harris, cut 100,000 jobs like they campaigned on, and spend money to pay down the debt right away? Is that the PC Party? Because I hear PC Party members getting up, over and over again, with all of the members on the one hand saying, “Spend in my riding. Spend in my riding. Health care needs more money and more resources,” and on the other hand saying, “Pay down the debt. Eliminate all interest payments.” Will the real PC Party please stand up?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Toby Barrett: I appreciate the opportunity to comment on the presentation from the government member opposite. As he was talking about the budget—as he said, good news for Ottawa—and the investment, the code word for spending on transit, spending on schools and spending on health care.

I will say that there is an allocation of funds for our local area hospital, Norfolk General Hospital, that has been starved for a number of years. But it falls a little flat when I think of my riding. We don't see the spending on transit. In fact, when we fuel up our trucks and vehicles, we know that money, including the new addition, the cap-and-trade fee, the tax, whatever you want to call it, will be generated and will go for transit in cities like Ottawa, not necessarily for culverts and bridges down in my riding.

It's great to hear about the significant amount of money going into schools in the Ottawa area. You made mention of a particular school in Ottawa.

We've been closing schools, a considerable number of schools, over the last 14 or 15 years.

I've been out and about. My wife and I, for example, had breakfast down the road. I took my wife out for breakfast on Saturday. I saw an ad for a \$5 breakfast, and I thought, “Well, let's go for that.” It was a \$6 breakfast, but that gives you an idea of the income level down in our area. The owner and his uncle sat down with us for well over an hour. They had heard about the budget and, as mentioned by my colleague from Perth–Wellington, as with Moody's and Standard and Poor's, their number one concern was the debt and who's going to pay that off.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our questions and comments for this round. We return to the Attorney General for his reply.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I wanted to thank the honourable members from Perth–Wellington, Nickel Belt, Etobicoke Centre and Haldimand–Norfolk for their comments on my remarks on the importance of passing this budget and how this budget is good news for my community. At the end of the day, my number one job is to represent my constituents, a responsibility everyone else also takes seriously. I highlighted the reasons why this budget speaks to the values and the needs and the aspirations of my constituents in the great riding of Ottawa Centre.

I do want to take issue with the two colleagues of mine from the PC Party who talked about debt. I will add

on to my friend from Etobicoke Centre who was talking about this, that, on one hand, we often joke around this side that you hear the “spend” question—“Spend on this hospital, spend on this school”—but then also we hear the “cut” question, as in “Why are you going to cut money?” I did talk about it in my remarks, Speaker. I did talk about why the deficit was in place. Clearly what I hear from members opposite is that if they were in government during the great recession, they would have done nothing. They would not have put any money into our health care, into our education, into our infrastructure when money had dried up because of the deficit.

They would have cut services. They would have made the people of Ontario suffer because they would have thought, “No, we’re not going to borrow any money.” That’s what I hear from them. And now, when they talk about debt, they don’t talk about what they’re going to cut. If you were in government and if you were dealing with debt, tell us what services you are going to cut. Are you going to close my school, Broadview Public School? Are you going to stop the construction of the Ottawa heart institute? Cancel the LRT phase 2 project? You—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I apologize for interrupting the Attorney General. I would ask the members on one side of the House—you can’t yell at the Attorney General constantly while he’s doing his two-minute response. I have to give him a few extra seconds now to finish up, and I apologize.

The Attorney General has the floor.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: My only point is as simple as that: When you start talking about debt, you also then have to talk about how you’re going to find money. What services are you going to cut? When your constituents are talking about the debt, please give them your list of services that no longer will be available to them.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: It’s been an interesting afternoon so far with the back and forth that’s been going on between the government and the members of the opposition and the third party. There have been a number of things said that, I suppose, depending on what side of the House you’re sitting on, you can believe or disbelieve, but I think that when we get down to really thinking about what’s proposed in this budget, when I get the ordinary person in Perth–Wellington, who just wants to live a good life—whether they’re starting a new job, a family or retiring—coming up to me and they see in the paper or they hear on the news about this budget—the newspaper reporters and radio reporters are all saying the same thing, that this government is hiding a \$5-billion operational deficit in this budget. I don’t have to start the conversation. In fact, I like to go out on weekends into the riding to different events and not talk politics. I like to go to festivals, like one I was at on Saturday, of the Teutonic choirs in Ontario. These are people who sing in German. They sing classical music, hymns and all kinds of songs. It was great. It was a two-hour performance.

We had five choirs performing, and it was something that was just absolutely beautiful.

1540

They showed me to my seat, and they had my name on the back of the seat. Before I got there, right away this lady came up to me and started into, “What’s this government trying to pull on us now?” That’s what she said: “What’s this government trying to pull on us now?” I said, “Ma’am, maybe we can speak about this later, after the performance.” But she was that upset, she kept on and on with it. This is what bothers people so much in this province. They get upset. Maybe at events such as this, they shouldn’t be talking about politics or anything of that nature, because we’re here to listen to a performance by these choirs, but they’re that upset at what has been going on with this government for this many years. That’s happening all over the province.

I went to the Listowel home and garden show on Sunday morning. The place was packed with great exhibits—furniture exhibits, lawnmower exhibits. It was just packed in the arena. It was the same thing. People were coming to me, saying, “What is going on here? It’s just unbelievable. What’s this government trying to fool us with again?” They were so dead set against selling Hydro One—some 80% of the people in this province are against selling Hydro One—which nobody knew they were going to do because it certainly wasn’t brought up at the last election, and they went and did it anyway. They had to do that. They had to sell assets because they didn’t have the money to pay for what they were trying to pay for.

Certainly, the revenue coming from the cap-and-trade tax has to be dumped into this to achieve what they call a balanced budget. As far as I knew, I thought that was supposed to go for infrastructure funding, but now they have to use a portion of it to pay down their deficit, to reach a balanced budget. Then, fortunately, they have a friend in the federal government, Mr. Trudeau: “Let’s help Ontario out.” Are they going to do that again next year? I doubt it. As we’ve seen, the federal government is running quite a deficit this year, so they’re going to have their own issues next year when they bring out their budget.

Then people say, “They claim they have a balanced budget by doing all these things,” but also what the newspapers are reporting and the reporters around my area are saying, is “But the debt is going up by another \$8 billion again this year”—I think that’s the figure. “Well, how come the deficit is being balanced and they can’t get control of the debt?” Because it’s doing this. What they don’t realize is that there’s almost a billion dollars a month going out to service our debt. That billion dollars could go a long way to health care—that would be great—or our education system. In fact, we spend more in paying for our debt servicing than we do for education. That’s scary. So I wonder—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I apologize. I have to ask the members on this side of the House now to refrain from heckling the member who has the floor.

There are lots of opportunities for people to speak to this motion and I'm sure there will be more opportunities, but in the meantime, I need to be able to hear the member for Perth–Wellington. The member for Perth–Wellington has the floor. I apologize for interrupting.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Thank you, Speaker. It's interesting how upset some people can get, especially when they know that what they're trying to pass on to the public is quite a shell game. They've been caught in it and they don't like being caught when they're doing these things. But they've been caught certainly this time.

Like I say, I go to events on the weekend like the lawn and garden show; I go to the choir on Saturday. I went to a public speaking that was put on by the Legion on Saturday—quite an entertaining show. They had young folks there, up to the grade 8 level, putting on very good speeches. Then I went to the Shriners' event in Stratford that was held at the Rotary Complex, which is quite a big complex they built in Stratford a number of years ago. They feed—I don't know—1,400 people there, I think the figures were. A chicken barbeque, excellent, and guess what? Same story: I walk in, I buy my tickets. I go over there and it's the same thing: "What are they trying to do to us now?" It's too bad that's what has come through this so-called balanced budget.

As I said, the debt is projected—I thought it was \$308 billion. It's supposed to increase to \$312 billion, which is 24% more than what it was five years ago. The debt is supposed to go up another 8% in two years, to \$336 billion. So as I said, I wish they could get off their addiction to debt. You're passing on a terrible load to our children and grandchildren as we look down the road. I think it stands at about \$22,000 of debt load right now to our children and every person who lives in Ontario. A \$22,000 debt; it's incredible. But of course, they don't care about that, obviously, because they keep increasing the debt all the time. There is nothing over on the government side that says, "We care about the debt in this province," because they just keep raising it all the time.

The budget is certainly a patchwork attempt to fix the mess they have created, and if they keep getting re-elected all the time, they'll keep going back to their old ways, raising your taxes, which they've done this time with the cap-and-trade tax, which is exactly what it is. They've raised your taxes.

Interjection: It's not a tax.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: They might not want to call this a tax, but there have also been increases in fees again, which they don't want to talk about. They've increased fees the last three years they've been in power, so why wouldn't they do it again? That's something they do. They don't like telling people that but that's what they do.

After freezing hospital budgets for four straight years, now they're trying to play catch-up. At a time when front-line health care workers continue to lose their jobs, this government is focused on growing our health care bureaucracy, such as the 80 new sub-LHINs and the 84

new LHIN vice-presidents that are proposed to be created. They're just throwing window dressing on their failures in an election year. That's what's going on. This is an election budget. We should have no doubt that this government's legacy is one of firing nurses and health care in the hallways.

1550

We've heard a couple of stories about health care in the hallways, and that's really scary, when patients have to spend a number of—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Once again, the member for Perth–Wellington has the floor. Other members will have a chance to debate this bill, if they choose. There's questions and comments. There are opportunities to participate. You don't have to yell at him while he's got the floor.

I return to the member for Perth–Wellington.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Thank you, Speaker. Let me see, where was I? Oh, infrastructure: That's another interesting one. It used to be \$160 billion over 12 years. Now it's \$190 billion over 13 years, so this is a moving target too.

They continue to make promises that they'll never be held accountable for. They continue to break transit promises, failing to break ground on important projects, and they waste billions on scandals and mismanagement while downloading costs on—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'm going to ask the member for Davenport to please refrain from heckling, for the third time.

The member for Perth–Wellington.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I look back to—I don't know—10 years ago, maybe nine years ago now, when we had the eHealth issue in this province. Apparently, that isn't up and running yet. We look at the electricity scheme in this province, the Green Energy Act especially, which has been nothing but a failure except for those who invest in wind turbines and solar projects. It locks taxpayers into 20-year contracts for overpriced wind and solar power.

It's also energy we don't need. Since 2009, Ontario has given away \$6 billion in surplus energy to the United States—\$6 billion. I think of a friend of mine in Milverton. I brought that story to the House, too. It's a great reminder of the mismanagement of the hydro system that has cost this man quite a bit of money. He's a grocery store owner in Milverton who actually got money from Hydro One to help him refurbish his store with LED lights. He also went and improved his cooling system in his freezers and his refrigeration system, doing all the right things in order to lower his cost of hydro. What happened, Speaker? You might remember this: His hydro bill went up 30% after he did all this, after Hydro One gave him money to help with fixing up his store to use less power. But the problem was that he was using less power now, so it put him in a different bracket, a different category, and his delivery rate went up 30%.

Does this make any sense? In fact, Mr. Carter said, “How can this government justify anything so stupid as this?” That was what he said.

We have had different stories. I have another: a hotel owner who went through the same thing. He improved his hotel, reinsulated it, put in new windows and doors, new lights. His costs went up.

The mismanagement of our hydro system has just been incredible in this province for the last number of years. We have asked to stop signing contracts under the Green Energy Act. This government is still doing that. We cannot continue to sign up for these contracts. We don't need the power.

You may know, Speaker, that currently we are spilling water over Niagara Falls. That is, pure and simple, the best green energy we have. Yet this government claims that wind and solar are the green option. Since 2015, this government has spilled or abandoned three billion kilowatt hours of energy from water power facilities that Ontario bought and paid for decades ago, because of these 20-year contracts they sign at high rates, which has certainly raised the cost of our electricity in this province.

Then we find out that the Liberals are so out of touch on spending, they spent nearly \$1 million on partisan advertising to spin their plan—almost \$1 million. It also looks like they're going to approve \$4.5 million of executive salaries to one person at Hydro One—\$4.5 million to one person, Speaker. As I said before, they're continuing to sign contracts and they're continuing to sell surplus electricity to other jurisdictions at a loss.

The government also says that they have a plan to help increase the supply of housing. In fact, their budget shows that they're reducing supply. The budget shows housing construction starts are projected to go down next year by almost 10%, or 6,500 housing construction starts. At the time same, they're cashing in huge because of higher housing resale prices and they're collecting more on the land transfer tax than ever before.

We've all been listening to the crisis in Toronto and the GTA with people not being able to buy houses or afford what houses are being listed for, but that's coming out to our area too. It's coming out to the Stratford area certainly. Housing prices have gone up—certainly not as dramatically as they have here in Toronto and the GTA, but it's filtering out our way. People are willing to drive farther to work in order to have a house of their own, so they're coming out our way for that.

But, again, we're in the same position that's happening down here. It's difficult to accommodate everyone who is looking for a new house, even out in our part of the country, because of the wave that's coming out. Yet this government is in the position of being able to collect more land transfer taxes because of the higher housing resale prices that we see.

I have just over a minute to continue. We're pleased, certainly, that the Liberals are following our call for more investments in graduating students for the jobs of tomorrow, but this government, for over 14 years, has failed to address the skills gap. Right now, we are

graduating students for jobs that don't exist. This needs urgent action.

Speaker, I'm very fortunate that my three boys have gotten good jobs, but they chose to go into the trades a number of years ago. The companies that they work for are looking for people to work for them, but they can't find any. As has been brought up here before, we graduated a couple of thousand more teachers than we needed in the province because of this government's misguided programs.

I want to thank you, Speaker, for the time. I will carefully listen to the comments.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions or comments?

Ms. Cindy Forster: Thank you to the member from Perth-Wellington for his comments on the budget motion. He talked about a number of events that he had attended on the weekend, so this is my opportunity to talk about one I attended, and the impact it feels from the budget.

1600

I was at the Royal Canadian Legion, Branch 4, yesterday. It was their 90th anniversary. It was a great celebration and I met Butch Hummel, who is 91 years old. He was getting acknowledged for being a member of that particular branch since he was 21 years old—for 70 years. It was a great event, attended by many.

They go above and beyond, at this branch, the mandate of the Legion. They do look after veterans and their families, but in fact they are also looking after seniors in our community. They have applied for and been successful in getting grants over the last few years. They're doing seniors' exercise programs and seniors' social events in addition to all of the veterans' activities that they have.

They talked a bit to me about the struggle that they're having because of their high hydro bills. With the sell-off of hydro, their bills have increased and they are going to continue to increase. They're a Legion with 800 members trying to remain viable, but they've got big coolers that they use for beverages, on two floors. They also have big commercial refrigerators that they use. They are having to put on more and more kinds of fundraising events in the Legion just to try and make ends meet.

I think the government needs to be cognizant of the fact that these non-profit agencies are struggling out there because of high hydro prices.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I sympathize with you today, because there is noise on this side of the House, but I tell you, it's so frustrating to sit in this House and listen over and over to things that simply are not true. So I'm going to use my two minutes to set the record straight on a couple of issues, and then I'm going to give you the resources where the members opposite can actually find out the facts. Because facts still matter, Speaker.

The member from Perth-Wellington said we spend more on interest on debt than we do on education. That is

simply wrong, by a factor of three. If he would take the time to read the budget—look on page 240. You'll see that we spend \$34.4 billion on education, JK to post-secondary. The interest on debt is less than one third of that. So he is wrong.

It's not to say that we like paying interest on debt, Speaker, but we do like investing in infrastructure. Any addition to the debt is 100% due to investments in infrastructure.

We heard the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound call us a have-not province. That is simply not true. It is true that we did receive \$2.3 billion in equalization, but we paid in \$6.9 billion. We are net contributors. We paid in \$6.9 billion to receive \$2.3 billion. I don't think that's what I'd call a have-not province.

We talk about education systems. We're celebrating today because we've made even further progress on the high school graduation rate. When those guys were in charge of education, one in three kids did not graduate. We're now at 86.5% of students graduating.

If you want more, go to factsstillmatter.ca or, if you prefer Twitter, @Ontariofacts.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I'm happy to comment on the remarks that my colleague from Perth–Wellington gave. I thought he did a great job outlining his position on behalf of his constituents as well as our caucus.

This budget continued to grow the cost and size of government here in the province of Ontario. I've long been on record saying we need to reduce the size and cost of government here. I think the debt numbers really speak to government growing here in Ontario. It has continued to grow since 2003, first under Premier Dalton McGuinty and now under the current Liberal Premier and her government.

I want to take an excerpt from a research bulletin that was released after the budget. It says, "The condition of Ontario's public finances has deteriorated markedly in recent years. The province's net debt ... has approximately doubled since 2007, and it is estimated that it will reach \$318 billion this year," as we all know. "In fact, Ontario has accumulated debt at a faster rate than any other province since 2003.... In recent years, Ontario has also increased debt at a much faster pace than the nearby manufacturing states of the American 'rust belt' which, like Ontario, saw their economies hit hard by the 2008-09 recession.... As a result, the province's public finances are in significantly worse condition than the American state of California, once the poster child for weak public finances...."

"This rapid increase in debt is problematic for several reasons. First, it represents a burden that will be passed along to future generations.... It also means more money must be spent servicing debt which makes it unavailable for other purposes such as" reducing taxes, "health care, or education."

I'm going to close by saying we need to rein in the cost of government here in the province. These debt numbers reflect a growth in government.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We have time for one last question or comment.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: It's always a pleasure to follow my friend from Perth–Wellington. He was talking about a stronger, healthier Ontario. He actually spoke about going to listen to some Teutonic choirs on the weekend.

My wife and I took our three-year-old granddaughter to the Walkerville Centre for the Creative Arts to see a student play called *Li'l Abner*. You may remember it, Speaker. It's about the small community of Dogpatch. Then a government representative comes with a plan to bring prosperity to the community by moving everybody out and relocating them. It sounded like a good idea at the time, but then *Li'l Abner's* mum, Mammy Yokum, reads between the lines and tells the good folks of Dogpatch that they'd have to go to school and they'd have to find jobs; so the government plan wasn't everything it seemed to be.

That, to me, brings a similarity to this bill, the so-called Stronger, Healthier Ontario Act, Bill 127. The budget isn't everything it seems to be. You might be able to fool some of the people, but not everyone is as gullible as Evil-Eye Fleagle, Stupefiyin' Jones, General Jubilation T. Cornpone, Earthquake McGoon, even Daisy Mae or, my favourite, Appassionata Von Climax.

The member from Welland talked about going to Branch 4 of the Legion on the weekend. Yesterday I dropped into Branch 255 in Windsor, Riverside. I've been a member there for 30 years. Of course, people there wanted to talk about the budget, they wanted to talk about hydro and they wanted to talk about a real pharmacare program, not a new drug plan for Ontario.

That brings it all home, Speaker: What's in the budget isn't everything it could be or everything it should be, and sometimes you just can't fool everybody all of the time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Perth–Wellington has two minutes.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I'd like to thank the members from Welland, London North Centre, Lambton–Kent–Middlesex and Windsor–Tecumseh.

You know, I will admit when I am wrong, and it was pointed out to me—here are the figures that I read wrong in my text, but the province now pays more in debt interest—that's about \$12 billion—than they spend on post-secondary education, on which they spend \$8.4 billion. So I will admit when I'm wrong. I wish the government would do that. I wish the government would do that and tell people that they have a false balanced budget here. They know that.

That's what the good people in my riding—certainly, the member from Welland pointed out the same thing. You go to these events, and they want to talk about what's going on down here in Toronto. "Why is this government trying to do this to us again?" That's the question they're asking: "Why is this province trying to do this again?" Because that's exactly what they're trying to do. They're trying to slip this in. They're going to pass this budget and try to sell to the people that it's balanced, that the budget is balanced. We all know it isn't; they

know it isn't. Certainly, if my constituents come up to me, as they did to the member from Welland, and say the same story—these people don't study these things all the time, but they tell us the same story: "Why is this government trying to do this again?" They're slipping us a not-balanced budget because they've had to sell parts of Hydro One, they've had to use taxes from the cap-and-trade system to do this and they've had to use money coming from the federal government to do this. What's going to happen in the years ahead? They've already sold the furniture. They haven't got any more to sell. How are they going to keep this going?

1610

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a pleasure to join the debate here this afternoon on Bill 127, the budget measures act.

I'm going to be focusing on a couple of schedules contained within the budget bill as they relate to current issues that we're facing in Kitchener–Waterloo and the province as a whole, and drawing, of course, the comparisons that the measures that are contained within the bill do not meet the needs of the people of this province. As we will be maintaining consistently, this budget does not undo 14 years of serious damage that the Liberal government has done to this province.

I'm going to get right into this because this is a very current issue. Schedule 13 deals with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, and schedule 20 the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. The reason that I'm raising this issue is because we discovered last Thursday in Kitchener–Waterloo that there had been a serious privacy breach with ServiceOntario that actually involved the personal information of as many as 5,600 people in Ontario being mailed to strangers after a printing mistake on health card renewal notices. The Ministry of Government and Consumer Services said Wednesday that they were still trying to determine the exact number of people affected and that they are still investigating what caused the error. The main point is that they do not know.

The release of personal, private information: Be it medical information, be it financial information, this is a government that has consistently had issues with maintaining the integrity of that information over the last 14 years. Some of it does go back to the way that this government seeks out or does an RFP process for contracting out of public services. We will maintain that the contracting out of public services to for-profit companies, who have private interests, who have profiting interests, often undermines the services that we rely on and that Ontarians that we are elected to serve rely on. Certainly that is a concern as it relates to this issue.

This story just broke on Thursday, and it says, "At least two Waterloo region families are left wondering who has their personal information after receiving health card renewal notices with someone else's details."

This is Darrell May, one of the constituents from K-W. He says, "It's kind of important the government protects that information." It's kind of important, right?

"His eight-year-old twin daughters have a birthday in July, and recently a renewal form came in the mail for both of them. One was fine. The other contained a shock.

"On the front of the form that's visible through the envelope was his daughter's name and address. On the back was the full name, address, date of birth, and health number of a young girl in Brantford. Both shared the same birthday, although a different year.

"It was another person's typed in with the wrong health card number," May said of the information on the form.

"Now he's worried"—as you would be—"who may have received his daughter's information, and what they could do with it. His other daughter's form also included her birth certificate number.

"Obviously there's some problem with the system," May said."

This would be an understatement. But it isn't all that shocking, actually, based on the record of this government.

"A New Hamburg father also contacted the Record to say his daughter's renewal notice came with another young girl's details, also from a different city with a birthday that was a few days different." So there's no rhyme or reason here.

"He said when he contacted ServiceOntario immediately after opening the letter, the two people he spoke to there did not seem overly concerned about the privacy breach. He was told a fixed version would be mailed, and he was asked to send back the incorrect form." So he was left to deal with the problem himself.

"Both fathers wondered how widespread the problem is and how many other people's personal information was sent to the wrong address.

"I just thought people should know. They should be held accountable," May said. "It applies to the whole province of Ontario, not just the city."

"The ministry said it will send an apology to all those affected, and ask they return the letters they received in the included prepaid envelopes.

It also notified, as it should, "the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Ontario about the ... privacy breach."

I have to say: That's a pretty nonchalant response to a serious privacy breach. This is a breach of trust. So the question remains: Was it a system error? Was it a human error? Why doesn't the minister responsible for consumer protection know? Why can't she even identify what kind of a problem it was? Why can't she identify how many people are directly affected, and what measures are going to be put into place to actually protect the people who now have the personal information of children, Mr. Speaker?

I read, with great interest, schedule 13 of the bill. I have to say that there are several other breaches that have happened across the province of late. This is a government that talks a lot about accountability, about transparency and about governance, and yet we have these continued issues where the personal information of the people we serve is shared in an irresponsible manner. It is unacceptable.

I did receive a response from the minister this morning. I asked her for an update, and she said, "Well, that's it. That's the letter." The letter says that they're very concerned, there is an issue and that the privacy commissioner will be investigating.

Once again, I want to say thank you to the independent officers of this Legislature for the work that they're doing because I feel that there will be some trust in the investigation that that privacy commissioner does with regard to this issue.

The other schedule that grabbed my attention is schedule 24, which is the Ontario Drug Benefit Act. This allows the government to reduce payments to pharmacies for dispensing drugs through the Ontario Drug Benefit. You will know that this is the seventh drug plan that the government has brought in. It has some limitations, but it does provide drug coverage for those under the age of 25. It is not a universal plan. When the minister was asked on budget day why the line was drawn at 25, the government could give no good reason, no rationale, why this plan is designed as it is.

If you have asthma and you are 24 years old, as of January you will have access to some medication free of cost. That's a good thing, but you will still have asthma when you turn 25 and then you don't have access to that medication.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Asthma never goes away.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Asthma is a very serious issue; no doubt about it.

I will say that as I was knocking on doors on Friday in Waterloo, some new buildings that are there, some condos, I had our petition and I was explaining the difference between this plan, this seventh drug plan that the government has brought in, OHIP+, I think they might be calling it, and the pharmacare plan that we think is genuinely in the best interests of the people of this province. I think that one of the major issues that people fundamentally understand is that this plan, the Liberal plan, will give access to drug coverage to a group that will not use that drug coverage as often as those who are 25 to 65. The workers I was speaking with on Friday have recognized that in their own life, in the lives of their children and some of them their grandchildren, the nature of work is changing desperately in the province of Ontario to have more part-time, precarious contract work. Because that work is of that nature, the averages of actually having a drug plan within those part-time, precarious contract jobs are almost nil. There's a reason why some employers want precarious part-time work: because they don't want to pay the benefits. They don't want to pay into a pension. You can do that if you have two split shifts with a worker, with two hours in the morning and three hours in the afternoon. There's no responsibility on the part of the employer to honour a true commitment in a collegial and responsible manner.

My goal was knocking on doors. I, quite honestly, enjoy knocking on doors between elections because I basically get to say, "I'm your MPP. I work for you. This is an idea that I feel strongly about, that our leader,

Andrea Horwath, feels strongly about, because we feel that if the province of Ontario, embraces a true pharmacare program, this will force the Prime Minister to follow through on a promise of a national pharmacare plan."

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You have to start somewhere. But it has to be a pharmacare plan in order to inspire pharmacare leadership. I feel strongly about that. I was really pleased that people were receptive to starting the petitions.

One of the biggest differences between the government's OHIP+ and our pharmacare plan is that you have greater bargaining power, Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the 14 million people who will require a drug program. The Ontario provincial drug plan would be negotiating on behalf of a demographic, on behalf of a huge number of potential clients, to secure a reduced price on those drugs.

Ontario has some of the highest drug costs in Canada. There is absolutely no reason for some of these drugs to be so cost-prohibitive when the research out there shows that this province could be leveraging their ability to negotiate for lower-cost drugs. The Liberal OHIP+ would—the government would only have approximately eight million, who are current ODB beneficiaries, plus children and youth. Ours would have 14 million. We have done some preliminary running of the numbers on how much this will save employers, such as small and large businesses and governments, individuals and private payers, as it's phased in: between \$835 million to \$1.9 billion.

I have to tell you, I think the government has underestimated the positive response to a true pharmacare program. This is good for businesses in Ontario. It's actually a competitive factor to hold businesses here, to draw them to the social infrastructure that we are so proud of in this province. These are fundamental differences, Mr. Speaker. Our plan would allow the vast majority of people in the province, the 2.2 million people who have no coverage whatsoever, to have some coverage with a very small copayment. The Liberal plan, unfortunately, promises drug coverage to a demographic and an age group who are not likely to need blood pressure medication, heart medication or diabetes—one would hope. So those are the fundamental differences on that.

The schedule 33 is also of great interest. It's the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act. This entitles workers under the insurance plan to receive benefits for chronic or traumatic mental stress arising out of and in the course of workers' employment.

This raises the entire spectre of mental health issues. I have to tell you, Mr. Speaker, I was attending Lutherwood's Steps for Kids this weekend. The lack of funding in the budget bill for children's mental health—advocates from across the province have asked for an immediate infusion of \$118 million. When I asked this question last week, the deputy minister stood up and said, "We gave \$7 million to the universities."

A hundred and eighteen million dollars is needed to alleviate a one-and-a-half-year wait-list for children who

are suffering from mental health issues. They are your own study, your own research, your own evidence in the face of knowing that hospitalization of children with mental health issues in crisis has gone up 67%. Hospital visits of children who are suffering—their families are in crisis—hospital ER visits have gone up 65%, and what is in this budget for children with mental health issues? Almost nothing. It was a complete and utter shock to the advocates across the province who have been sharing and working in so-called collaboration with this government to ensure that children have access to the kind of counselling that they need. The results, Mr. Speaker, are often devastating for the entire family and sometimes for the community. We have a shocking suicide rate in the province of Ontario. We can do something about it and we need to do something about it, but this budget does not address the need for mental health funding in any significant kind of way. The cost to the health care system, the cost to the economy and the cost to the quality of life that we are all trying to improve for the people that we serve is undermined once again by a budget that leaves mental health to the side, on the back burner.

Last week, we had the family counselling centres here, and they told us first-hand. KW Counselling said that they rely on funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation and from United Way. Now, I'm going to tell you, that is never sustainable funding from Trillium. People are so happy to get it; of course, they're happy to get it. The children's mental health patchwork system is so frayed—it's frayed; it's broken—and these amazing advocates who were here last week are essentially stitching it together. They are barely holding a mental health level of service together in the province of Ontario. So much needs to be done on that front.

The last schedule—or one of the last ones that I probably will only have time to talk to—is schedule 16, the Land Transfer Tax Act, or schedule 4, the City of Toronto Act. Schedule 16 addresses the fact that this year the provincial government took in \$2.7 billion in land transfer taxes. This is higher than average and directly related to the cost of homes in the GTA. So the provincial government is benefiting from the high cost of housing in the city of Toronto.

I have to tell you, the lack of affordable funding in this budget I think was the biggest shock for us, especially given the fact that the mayor and council have done an amazing job, really, of trying to educate this government, and in the face of a crisis. It is a housing crisis in the province of Ontario, and no one, especially in the GTA or the 905 ridings, can deny that on the supply side of affordable housing, this government has barely done anything in 14 years. Not only that, but Toronto Community Housing, the largest social housing provider in Canada, is planning to close 400 homes next year because of a lack of repair money. Those closures, on top of 600 units to be boarded up this year, would bring the total number of shuttered homes to 1,000 by the end of 2018.

We are going in the opposite direction around housing, and this, again, in the face of evidence that shows and demonstrates that when you have an affordable housing option in life, it is the number one factor to raise a family out of poverty. It stabilizes the life of the children in that family so that they can reach their potential in the education system. It is a direct economic driver not only in the creation of those affordable housing units, but in the stabilizing of those workers in those houses. It adds to the health care system and the mental health care system. It addresses fundamental core principles of addressing poverty in the province of Ontario.

This government had \$25 million in affordable housing. The province of Nova Scotia, with an overall budget of \$10 billion, had \$38 million. Nova Scotia had more money for affordable housing than the province of Ontario, Mr. Speaker. It's a fact; it's not an alternative fact. You can check it, I have to tell you. Joe Cressy said last week at the city of Toronto: "We should be discussing how to open new affordable housing units, not debating how many we're going to have to close." The repairs that are on the backlog are no surprise to anyone.

Toronto Community Housing, which manages the 60,000 units—minus 1,000 now—over 2,100 buildings, needs to secure an additional \$350 million for repairs. We have said that we will come to the table in a shared funding model, in collaboration, in a sustainable funding partnership with the city of Toronto. We have said that because we understand how important housing is. For some reason, in the face of a very high-pressure, very tense political relationship with the city of Toronto, you have members across the benches who have done almost nothing for affordable housing in their own riding, in the face of dire need—particularly how it affects women.

Those are the main schedules that I wanted to bring to your attention, Mr. Speaker. I think they warrant further attention: children's mental health, housing and health care.

The story that I brought to the Minister of Health this morning of the seniors who cannot stay in the same long-term-care facility after 14 years of not having a provincial strategy; to address changing demographics in the province of Ontario—the family has called that cruel. They see it for what it is. And I believe the people of this province see this budget for what it is: electioneering document extraordinaire.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Yvan Baker: I'm really disappointed to hear the member for Kitchener-Waterloo refer to the initiatives that are in this budget that way. When I was out in my community over the past week since the budget was released, people are pleased to see investments in health care. They're pleased to see OHIP+. They're pleased to see investments in new hospitals. They're pleased to see the increase in funding for hospitals to provide greater quality and access to care and speed of care. They're pleased to see the investments in education, the building

of new schools. They're pleased to see a range of measures that are there—the measures that we've taken on housing. To hear the member opposite talk about this as though to make it political, to me, is very disappointing.

These are initiatives that matter to the people of Ontario. These are the issues that we all debate in this House. I hear from members opposite all the time. Even the PCs, who want to slash and burn the budget, talk about investments in health care and education. Now here we are making those investments, and they're being criticized. I find that surprising.

I think this is a budget that provides incredibly important investments in those areas where we've heard from our constituents that those investments are needed. People of all ages, particularly seniors, need access to accessible, quality care. We're doing our best to invest greater funds in that.

We've heard about the need to invest in education, to continue to reduce class size. We're doing that.

We've heard about the need to make housing more affordable. We've taken measures to do that.

The member opposite also spoke about her perception that the members, particularly the Toronto members, of this caucus aren't standing up for Toronto. There's nothing further from the truth. She should stop sharing that inaccuracy, that falsehood, about the members of this caucus who work incredibly hard for the 416 and for the city of Toronto. There is—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member has made an unparliamentary remark, and I would ask him to withdraw it.

Mr. Yvan Baker: I withdraw, Speaker.

I would appreciate if the member opposite spoke the truth about what the members of the 416 area are doing on behalf of the city of Toronto. We are advocating for housing. We're advocating for health care. We're advocating for education. We're advocating for affordable housing.

Since 2003, the province has put in the majority of the funding that goes toward housing in the 416. We've delivered for the city of Toronto, and we'll continue to do so in the years to come.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bill Walker: It's a pleasure to comment on my colleague from Kitchener–Waterloo. She always brings a lot of information to the table. Certainly, her point about mental health and especially for youth—very disappointing in the budget. She talked about health care and the challenge with hospital visits going up. She talked about seniors in long-term care—and again, nothing in there for new beds, despite knowing that there are 26,500 people on a waiting list.

The Deputy Premier, when she was speaking earlier, challenged me in regard to a comment I made. Well, what I'd like to bring up is that when you receive equalization payments, which our province almost never had heard of before, that is still taking a handout. You

can spin it; you can use whatever terminology, but the people of Ontario understand that you're just moving the shell game here and trying to use terminology.

I want to correct the record for my colleague from Perth–Wellington. What he was suggesting was that \$12 billion is spent on interest payments on the debt—more than post-secondary education, which is only \$8.4 billion. That's interesting from a party that professes to be the education party.

I was pleased to see the Attorney General. He talked about, in the recession, they had to borrow. And the children and our youth—paying down debt so that our youth actually have a fighting chance when they come out should be a priority.

He asked about what cuts people would make. I can tell you some cuts that happened in my riding as a result of this government: 50 educational assistants, and yet I didn't see any money in there to replace any of those; 18 potential schools in my riding are going to be cut and taken out of our communities; and \$47 million was cut from the agricultural budget, despite this government suggesting that they are the keepers of agriculture.

Also, the member from St. Catharines, the dean of the Legislature and the chief government whip—he was good. He suggested that you sometimes have to be negative in opposition, not because you want to, but because that's the reality of the facts. Our job is to challenge the government.

He used the term “challenging circumstances.” I'm wondering if the Green Energy Act and the \$133 billion that they're going to spend on these contracts is a challenging circumstance. Was the \$6 billion paid to the US and Quebec to get rid of our surplus energy or the \$8 billion on eHealth a challenging circumstance? I would suggest that there were choices that could have been made. That was poor and bad management.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I was listening intently to my good friend from Kitchener–Waterloo and her comments on this bill. I must say, I was saddened to hear the member from Etobicoke Centre express his disappointment with the comments made by the member from Kitchener–Waterloo. The member from Kitchener–Waterloo talked about, for example, Toronto housing being in dire need of a provincial funding partner to help out with the—what is it?—\$2.6-billion cost in repairs that are needed.

The member from Etobicoke Centre suggested that the member from Kitchener–Waterloo had suggested that the Toronto members of the Liberal government weren't working hard enough for their constituents. That's not what I heard. I heard the mayor of Toronto hold a press conference, a news conference, with the leader of the official opposition and I saw the transportation minister, along with the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore, try to crash that news conference because they were upset that the mayor of Toronto apparently had held up some leaflets critical of the member from Etobicoke North and

the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore, suggesting they weren't working hard enough, and for them to contact their MPPs to express that.

Interjections.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: If there were no leaflets held up like that, then I'll apologize, but that's my understanding. I can stand to be corrected, but if the mayor of Toronto is calling out the Liberal members and saying they're not doing their job, I think everyone in this House should be listening, because Toronto is a major partner and has to remain a major partner. We need funding partners if we're going to resolve the affordable housing crisis in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Daiene Vernile: I'm very pleased to have the opportunity to offer you another point of view on Kitchener–Waterloo. That's my home area—Kitchener Centre. The following day, Speaker, I held a budget luncheon which was very well—

Mr. Paul Miller: This is fake news now.

Ms. Daiene Vernile: Do you want to hear what I have to say or don't you?

Interjections.

Ms. Daiene Vernile: Okay. They don't want to hear.

Speaker, these are not my words. I'm going to share with you the feedback I received at the budget luncheon, which was very well attended the following day.

Ann Bilodeau, who is with KW Habilitation, offers services to the developmentally disabled in our community. She's thrilled to see that we are allocating \$130 million to the developmentally disabled.

The head of our local LHIN, Joan Fisk, is delighted to see that we are spending \$11.5 billion over three years on increased health care.

Nutrition for Learning is a local organization. They offer meals in schools to children who are in need. Mary D'Alton is so excited that we are going to be allocating \$150,000 over the course of three years to this.

Dave Jaworsky, the mayor of Waterloo came to my budget luncheon. He said that the budget is very positive and he applauded it.

We have some other specific spending for Waterloo region, which was very well received: our new kick-start strategy—the University of Waterloo is very excited to see this. We are investing \$75 million over five years for an advanced research computing and big data strategy. In fact, just this past Friday, I was at an event where we kicked off a new supercomputer by the name of Graham, and support from the province is going to help the largest computer in Canada.

The Communitech Hub is delighted to see that we are going to be investing in an Ontario digital service, and they're going to be offering internships and co-op placements, and Waterloo's Quantum Valley is also excited.

They're all going to be looking to see how Waterloo region members vote on this budget. They're watching us closely.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our time for questions and comments.

I return to the member for Kitchener–Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: They don't have to watch. I have a good relationship with all those people, and I can give very good rationale for not supporting this budget, which does not undo the damage of 14 years of Liberal government that has consistently put itself first, and everybody in the province knows it.

I have to say to the members from Etobicoke Centre, Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound and Kitchener Centre that there is no denying the fact that the affordable housing money was not in this budget. In fact, John Tory was quoted—"He said he was beyond disappointed with last week's provincial budget.

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"What we saw, what we got was a big goose egg when it comes to social housing repairs. There is just no new money in this budget for social housing repairs," Tory said, adding there is a backlog of \$2.5 billion in repairs needed in the city."

It is amazing; I mean this is how desperate the city of Toronto is—and rural and northern communities are in the same boat—that the mayor has to go out and self-print pamphlets asking the MPPs from the 905 and the GTA to do their jobs—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'm sorry to interrupt, and I'll give you some extra time, but I would ask the members on this side of the House to refrain from heckling the member for Kitchener–Waterloo. She has every right to respond to the questions and comments. She has two minutes to respond, and I'm going to give her some extra time.

The member for Kitchener–Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you, Speaker. None of this electioneering budget does anything for Jim and his wife, who I brought to the attention of the health minister this morning. The wait-list for long-term care just in Waterloo–Wellington alone is 2,600 people. You have his wife in a long-term-care facility and you have the CCAC saying, "Give us a list, and we'll try to get you into some home." After over 40 years of marriage, they can't be together.

The people in Waterloo see how harmful and how hurtful it is putting the Liberal Party ahead of the people of this province. They are not buying what you're selling. The only people who are buying are Bay Street on Hydro One shares.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 47(c), I am now required to interrupt the proceedings and announce that there has been more than six and one-half hours of debate on the motion for second reading of this bill. The debate will therefore be deemed adjourned unless the government House leader or his designate specifies otherwise.

I recognize the Minister of Citizenship.

Hon. Laura Albanese: No further debate, Mr. Speaker.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

BOARD OF INTERNAL ECONOMY

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I beg to inform the House that in accordance with section 87 of the Legislative Assembly Act, the name of the following person appointed to serve on the Board of Internal Economy has been communicated to the chair of the Board of Internal Economy: Peter Milczyn, MPP, is appointed by the caucus of the government in the place of Yvan Baker, MPP.

2017 ONTARIO BUDGET

BUDGET DE L'ONTARIO DE 2017

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 3, 2017, on the motion that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I wish I could say that I'm here to speak on this budget motion with pleasure in my heart, that it was actually a pleasure to stand and rise to speak to the motion, Speaker, but it is actually my duty to speak today out of concern for the people of Ontario who will be impacted by this budget. The simple fact is, the people are hurting in the province of Ontario today. Wages are down, the cost of living is up, and families and businesses are reaching a breaking point. This budget was the Premier's chance to turn things around, to undo some of the damage she's done and show Ontarians that she understands what they're going through, but that's not what Ontarians received in this budget. To be blunt, this budget doesn't even come close to undoing the damage that the Liberal government has done.

Ce budget ne renverse pas les dommages causés aux familles de l'Ontario.

Under this government, hydro bills have shot through the roof, and this budget offers no new relief. Electricity is not a luxury, and it shouldn't be priced like one. Everywhere I go, people are telling me that their families are at a breaking point—people like Jane in Kingston. When I met Jane, she told me that she struggled with rising costs and couldn't afford both her hydro bill and her groceries—I'm sure the MPP from Kingston is quite interested in this story. Jane was quite worried, having to make that choice. Faced with groceries or the hydro bill, Jane decided that the most important thing was for her to buy groceries. Of course, not surprisingly as a result, her hydro was cut off. It's heartbreaking to see the choices that people are having to make, that people are being forced to make by Kathleen Wynne's Liberal government.

I also think of Richelle in Smithville. Her hydro bill is so high that she was forced to choose between filling her family's prescriptions or paying to keep the lights on. No mother should ever have to do that.

So many people feel trapped. They're working harder than ever, but they're struggling every single month to keep their family above water, to get ahead of the bills.

There are people in Ontario who literally lie awake at night, worried sick about how they're going to pay their hydro bill. I see what families are dealing with. I have been seeing what families have been dealing with for year after year after year, as this government has paid no attention to the struggles that people have been facing. I see that we've actually reached that tipping point in our province, in Ontario.

What we need is bold action in our province. We need bold action to help people right now. We need big ideas, the kind of big ideas from government that help families find security, that build their future, that help them to build their future and help them to make sure that their kids are going to have the same kind of opportunity that they did right here in our great province of Ontario.

But that's not what we see in this budget; that is not what we're seeing in this budget. The Liberals have spent 14 years driving up hydro costs for families, and instead of using this budget to finally help the people of Ontario, the Premier is continuing the sell-off of Hydro One, further damaging the public control of a vital service.

The budget in fact shows that \$1.2 billion in dividends from our profitable corporation are gone. They're filling the pockets of the Liberals' friends who bought the shares. So families like Richelle's are paying more for their hydro and getting less—less money for schools, less money for hospitals.

The Premier watched those hydro bills rise year after year in our province until it became an absolute crisis for people, and she didn't seem to get it. All that time when we were travelling around the province—myself as leader of the Ontario NDP, my colleague NDP MPPs—listening to the horrifying stories of people at their wits' end because they could no longer pay their hydro bills, she didn't seem to get it. She seemed to be the only one in Ontario who didn't get it, that people were unable to pay their bills anymore. In fact, she didn't seem to care—that is, of course, until it became a political crisis for the Liberal government. Once it became a political crisis for the Liberal Party, well then, holy smokes, let's get some action on that file.

Ontarians have made it clear: They believe in public power. Over 80% of the people of Ontario believe in public power. Ontarians know that to solve the real problems in hydro, the system must be publicly owned and publicly operated. Most importantly, it needs to be operated in the best interests of Ontarians—not the best interests of shareholders, but the best interests of families like Richelle's, families like Jane's. It's time the people of Ontario were able to pay less for and own more of our hydro system.

I'm happy to say the New Democrats have developed a plan that would do exactly that. That plan is available for everyone to see, for everyone to read in far more detail, frankly, than what the government has proposed, where we still don't see any details of their intentions.

I strongly urge the Premier to read the NDP plan. This plan will stop the damage that Premier Wynne is doing and actually start to reverse it. It will take immediate

steps to regain control over hydro costs without simply kicking the can down the road to the next generation, which is what this Premier has proposed. She's content with an electricity system that serves the best interests of her friends, as opposed to the best interests of the people, and in order to keep her friends happy for the long term, she's prepared to let the next generation of Ontarians pay for it. How shameful is that? Absolutely the wrong direction and the wrong thing for the province of Ontario.

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To make a real difference in the lives of Ontarians, we must stop the disastrous sell-off of Hydro One and bring it back into public hands with full public oversight. We need to restore fairness to the system. We should be working to lower bills through such measures as making sure that rural folks are paying the same delivery charges as urban customers are paying. We have to cap the private profit margins that are built into our electricity system. We have to end mandatory time-of-use pricing—which is a failed policy; that, everyone can see—by giving the Ontario Energy Board a new mandate to stand up for the public and ensure that the bills are lowered.

Speaker, we have to make it fair, and we have got to fix systemic problems that are inflating rates, so that the people of this province know that their electricity system is there for their benefit, for the benefit of business and industry, and not simply for the benefit of Liberal friends.

The NDP plan shows exactly how we can do that: by ending the ridiculous practice that we currently undertake, which is paying for all kinds of power that we don't even use; by renegotiating terrible, terrible contracts that feathered the nests of Liberal friends but that we're paying through the nose for. Of course, I'm talking about those private contracts that Liberals—and, frankly, Conservatives—have signed, which make insiders very, very wealthy, but leave Ontario families and businesses paying for electricity that, as I said, we don't even use.

The meaningful changes that I proposed would make a real difference for people. By acting now, we could lower hydro bills by up to 30% in the short term and much, much more going forward. Affordable, reliable, clean public power can be the backbone of our electricity system, just like it used to be the backbone of our electricity system until that party and now that party got a hold of it. But it needs a government that is willing to make bold and meaningful change that benefits the people of our province, not that benefits some certain select friends and acquaintances of the governing party.

Unfortunately, this budget makes it very, very clear that Ontarians won't see that kind of meaningful change. They won't see that kind of meaningful change until they see a change in government.

The Premier sold off Hydro One without the consent of its owners, the people of Ontario, while denying for years that skyrocketing hydro bills were even a problem, and she's doing it again. This Liberal government isn't undoing the damage that it has done to hydro in Ontario; it's doing more damage, Speaker. It's all incredibly clear when you look at the government's phantom plan in the

budget. There's nothing there to save money for anyone who pays a hydro bill: no savings for Ontarians, no transparency for Ontarians, no accountability for Ontarians, no fixes for long-standing, system-wide problems in our electricity system; just more privatization, more deregulation.

This budget doesn't help Ontarians who are struggling with the choice to heat or eat. The budget actually makes it worse. This Premier governs like she has never even had to open her own hydro bill. It is shameful. Out-of-control hydro is hurting this province, and this budget is only going to make things worse.

While families' costs are up and their wages are flat, which we all know is the case, the things that they count on—the things that families count on, the things that Ontarians count on, like health care—are being squeezed by this government.

Mr. Speaker, the chronic overcrowding of Ontario hospitals is absolutely out of control. This government has starved our hospitals for nine years. I remember being on the campaign trail and I remember a certain Kathleen Wynne saying in her platform that she was going to cut the deficit—get rid of the deficit—and not touch health care or education. What a joke that turned out to be.

This sounds a little bit like promising to get auto insurance rates down. I guess it was a stretch goal for the Premier. I guess it was like not telling people that she had an intention of selling off Hydro One. People deserve a person who is going to be running for the leadership of this province, for the Premier of this province, to be truthful on the campaign trail, to tell people what she's actually going to do.

That's not what happened, of course, and now we know that as a result of nine years of hospital cutbacks—four of which were literally frozen budgets, which we know with inflation means rollbacks in the amount of money that hospitals have to take care of the patients in this province—what's happening? People are being treated in what the government calls “unconventional spaces.” If you go to emergency, instead of a hospital room you might end up in one of those unconventional spaces. People say, “What does that look like?” It looks like stretcher after stretcher after stretcher lined up in a hallway with a sign over top that says, “Hallway Room 1” or “Hallway Patient 1.” “Hallway Room 2.” “Hallway Room 3.” Imagine being a patient, Speaker; imagine being a patient in pain—in agony—worried about what's wrong, worried about what's happening to your health because you had enough of a concern about what was happening that you ended up in emergency. And there you lie in a hallway for days on end, where the lights are constant, 24/7, where there is activity everywhere, where, when the doctor comes to talk to you about what's wrong, everybody in the hallway hears about your personal health problems.

How undignified is that, Speaker? How undignified is that? That that Liberal government has allowed our hospitals to degenerate to that point where people cannot

get dignified service is shameful. It is a disgrace. They should be embarrassed. They should be ready to give up and walk out of here and never run for government again, they've done such a terrible job on the most important file, the thing that people care the most about, which is their health and the health of their loved ones.

You're in a hallway or you end up in a utility closet or a broom closet, or you end up in a TV room, like the 84-year-old woman from Sudbury who ended up in a TV room for almost three weeks straight, with three other patients and no bathroom. That's the kind of health care that this Liberal government has been providing to the people of Ontario. We deserve so much better than that.

When New Democrats talk about the damage that Kathleen Wynne and her government have done, look no further than hydro and hospitals. Unfortunately, the list is much, much longer. But let's face it: in a hospital, lying in a TV room, a hallway, a shower room, a broom closet, no privacy, no comfort and no dignity whatsoever; those alarm bells have been sounding for a long time, Speaker. This problem did not occur overnight. New Democrats have been raising those concerns in this Legislature for years now. Doctors, nurses and health care professionals have been speaking out, but the Liberal government still doesn't seem to get it.

Linda Haslam-Stroud, the president of the Ontario Nurses' Association, says this: "Our hospitals have been starved of funding for years, and our patients have paid the price as hospitals slashed more than 1,600 RN positions—to dangerously low levels."

1700

This budget was the Premier's chance, Speaker. This budget was actually the Premier's chance to finally start undoing some of the damage she has done in Ontario hospitals. But once again, this Liberal Premier and this Liberal government have let us down. They have let all Ontarians down. Instead of fixing the problem in our hospitals, this budget falls over \$300 million short of what the hospitals themselves say that they need just to maintain the current level of service, which we all know is extremely inadequate. And that wouldn't even undo the damage that the Liberals have done over the last decade.

The government's starvation budget and callous cuts have broken our hospital system—nine years, they've broken our hospital system. The Premier is making decisions like she's never had to go to a crowded ER before, like she's never had to watch a loved one suffer the indignity of being treated in a hallway. Hallway health care is a crisis, and boy, we are in that crisis now. C'est une crise humaine.

Every day, Ontarians are paying the price, Speaker, every single day. I was talking earlier about Olive Bird. Our colleague from Nickel Belt talked about Olive's concerns in the Legislature last week. I wish Olive's experience was an experience that was an exceptional one, something that rarely happens in Ontario's hospitals. But more and more and more, Olive Bird's experience of being in a TV room with three other patients, with no washroom, is happening all the time in Ontario hospitals.

Just last week, I was joined here at Queen's Park by a young woman named Jamie-Lee Ball. Many people will remember Jamie-Lee. For days, she was known as "Hallway Patient Number 1" in Brampton. She is one of many Ontarians who have felt the damage done by this government. Jamie-Lee was left to suffer in a hospital hallway in Brampton in terrible pain, with internal bleeding. You know what, Speaker? I have to tell you that I think Jamie-Lee is actually a hero. That woman is a hero because she went through an experience that made her vulnerable, that attacked her dignity, and then she opened up even further to tell her story, because she wants to stop this kind of thing from happening to any other fellow Ontarian. Her bravery is inspiring. It takes a lot of courage to go public and allow your personal health information and the indignity that you experienced in the hospital to be known to everybody—everybody out there who's got a TV or reads a newspaper or happens to be on the Internet. She is a hero because she took that personal experience and her own private information and she agreed to talk about it publicly, to try to solve a problem, or at least to try to highlight a problem, hoping that the government would be able to then step in and do what they're supposed to do and solve the problem, instead of make it worse.

So Jamie-Lee and I connected after the budget to talk about what we saw in that budget. Was the government doing what needed to be done to solve the problem? Of course, everyone hoped this budget would be that turning point, that turning point in our province that would undo some of the damage that this Liberal government has done in our province. But like so many of us, Jamie-Lee was extremely disappointed by what she saw. The budget does not even begin to undo the damage that has been done to our hospitals, to our health care system.

I want to tell Ontarians that I believe firmly that it does not have to be this way. People like Jamie-Lee and Olive deserve a government that will stop the cuts inside Ontario hospitals and ensure that hospital funding always keeps up with demand. And they deserve a government that will place a moratorium on any further cuts to front-line health care workers, health professionals and providers of health care. Ontario deserves a government that puts people at the heart of our health care system. That's what needs to happen. People need to be at the heart of our health care system. But from the looks of this budget, Speaker, they're going to have to wait for a change in government before they get the leadership that they deserve when it comes to our hospitals.

Of course, health care doesn't end at the hospital door, as we all know. When a patient like Jamie-Lee Ball finally leaves the hospital hallway or their doctor's office, they often head home with prescriptions. But this government believes that anyone between the ages of 24 and 65 should have to empty their wallet or rack up credit card charges in order to fill that prescription.

That's why, not long ago, I announced a comprehensive, universal pharmacare plan for the province of Ontario. That plan would give all Ontarians access to the

medications that they need. Even Health Minister Eric Hoskins has described universal pharmacare as “the missing half of our health care system.” I couldn’t agree more, but the budget was Kathleen Wynne’s opportunity, the Premier of this province’s opportunity, to give Ontario that missing half of our medicare system. It’s a big idea, absolutely, but it is doable. It is doable, it is reasonable and it is affordable, Speaker. It’s just the kind of big idea that Ontarians need to make their lives a little easier, to help make their paycheques go a little further and to better protect their health.

As someone who has been listening to Ontarians about their struggles under the Liberal government, I can’t help but think of a young graduate from university, struggling to pay down their student loans and find a good, stable job that lets them plan for the future, who has just lost their student health plan upon graduation. The Premier believes that graduate should pay up if they need medicine.

I think all those working people, those hard-working people who don’t have a prescription drug plan, one third of all workers—I believe that all of those people should be able to get the drugs that they need without having to rack up debt, without having to pull out their wallet. The Premier believes that those people should still be paying up for their prescription medication. She thinks that all those folks, those one in three workers without a benefit plan at work, should still be opening up the wallet, getting out the credit card.

One in four Ontarians right now don’t take the medication that they need, Speaker. Some of them will actually get the prescription filled and go straight to the kitchen table and start cutting their pills in half to try to stretch that prescription for a little bit longer, because it’s so expensive that they know they can’t afford to get it filled at the regular interval. Some don’t even fill their prescriptions because they can’t afford them. They walk out of the doctor’s office with that prescription in hand knowing full well that they have no intention of filling it: not because they don’t want to, not because they don’t want to take care of their health, Speaker, but because they simply cannot afford it.

That has serious long-term consequences for that person. It has consequences for them and their health and their well-being. It has consequences for their loved ones. And it has consequences, also, for our already over-worked health care system.

It just doesn’t make any sense whatsoever that in Canada, someone could go to a doctor without having to pay, thanks to former NDP Premier of Saskatchewan Tommy Douglas, but to get a prescription filled after seeing that same doctor, they have to empty their wallet.

People deserve to have access to the medications that they need, Speaker. When we think about the lives we can save, the families we can make healthier, we can’t afford not to have a universal pharmacare plan in the province of Ontario. We must put in place a universal pharmacare program for the families, the individuals, the people who call the province of Ontario home—for their

health, for the well-being of their families. In fact, it will actually create significant downstream savings in our health care system because people will stay healthier and they will stay out of the emergency rooms and out of the hospitals longer.

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Speaker, I’ve been talking a lot about affordability of hydro bills and medications. These are things that are draining people’s wallets and chequing accounts, but I have to say that under this Liberal government, housing costs have also skyrocketed and social housing stock has been allowed to crumble. As a result, while waiting lists for social housing continue to grow, housing units are literally being taken out of circulation. They’re being shuttered, shut down and, in some cases, sold off.

This morning, as has been mentioned, I had the opportunity to tour some of Toronto’s decaying social housing. The conditions I saw this morning were heartbreaking: going into a unit and seeing what was once probably a beautiful parquet floor literally torn apart, with little bits of the parquet wood all over the place, the flat concrete slab of the floor pretty much visible everywhere. The kitchen was literally falling apart. The cupboards where the sink was were completely decayed from many, many years of leaks of water. Mold. Really, it was quite a sight. Obviously, that unit was uninhabited. That was a unit where one of the close to 200,000 people on the waiting lists for social housing in Toronto could have actually been living with a roof over their head that was affordable, but because of the lack of attention by the provincial government and other orders of government to the repair needs of the social housing stock in this province, that housing unit is not usable, is not livable.

Then we went to a couple of the units where there were tenants, Speaker. Anne told us about a door that was broken, windows that were broken, and she hadn’t been able to get any repairs. We went to see a gentleman named Assad. His unit had its problems as well, particularly the kitchen. Along the ceiling, the plaster was all mottled. It obviously had had a leak and it was starting to chip off. It was all blistered. The cupboards were literally falling off the hinges. It was a disgrace. No member in this House would want to be living in those kinds of facilities. No member in this House would allow their loved ones to live in a facility like that.

The social housing stock is called social housing because it’s owned by government, and government should be doing its job to ensure that that housing is habitable for the people that live there, but so far, that’s not the case. These Ontarians deserve safe, clean, affordable housing. Families, parents, seniors and people with mobility issues and various other kinds of disabilities and exceptionalities live in that housing. They have to go there every day and deal with the state of repair that none of us would deal with. They deserve to live with dignity, like everybody else deserves to live with dignity.

The city of Toronto is investing \$900 million in the repair of Toronto Community Housing Corp.’s stock, but so far this provincial government has refused to come to

the table with their share. The newest provincial budget was the Premier's chance to undo some of the damage that her Liberal government has done to social housing by being absent across the province. But in 2018, provincial funding for Toronto's housing programs is expected to be less than half of what the city received in 2011. That's a loss of nearly \$180 million a year for Toronto's social housing, emergency shelters and homelessness prevention programs.

Well, you know what? It seems to me that I remember this government, time and time again, when it took their fancy, bragging about what they were going to do about homelessness in this province. They've done the opposite. They've allowed social housing to crumble to the point where the units aren't even available for people to rent. That's not how you solve homelessness. You don't allow your social housing stock to crumble and be forced to be taken off-line. That's not how you solve homelessness.

There's almost no new money for affordable housing in this budget, and there's no money for social housing repairs, which leaves urgently needed social housing stock at risk of closure—especially in cities like Toronto, where the repair backlog has reached crisis levels. This budget will not help any of the 181,000 families on the affordable housing wait-list, and it will not protect any family living in social housing whose home is at risk of closure due to disrepair. With this recent provincial budget, it has become clear that if Ontarians want a provincial government that will take social housing seriously, they're going to have to wait for a change in government.

With 300 schools on the chopping block today, there is no commitment in this budget to save schools that families depend on. A \$4.6-million cut to special education funding is still going ahead in 15 school boards. That means that the most needy children, those children with exceptionalities that require extra help and support from our education system, are not going to get that support in those 15 school boards because this Liberal government is taking away over \$4 million—\$4.6 million—of special education funding, when in fact the opposite needs to happen. There needs to be more special education funding as we see more and more children show up on the autism spectrum and more and more parents dealing with the need to make sure that their kids get a chance to actually fulfill their best possible potential. This government doesn't seem to care about that.

The other thing that we didn't see in this budget is any acknowledgement and recognition that the vibrant urban centres that have modern-day transit systems need to have the participation of other orders of government when it comes to the operation of those transit systems. This government has completely ignored the fact that in other major metropolitan areas the state level or the provincial level comes to the table and helps in the operation of those systems. In New York City, New York state is at the table with billions of dollars of operating funding for that transit system. The same thing happens all over the world, but not here, not here in Toronto.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: It used to.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It used to be the case that the provincial government funded 50% of the operating costs of transit systems in this province. That's what used to happen, Speaker, but it doesn't happen anymore. The previous government stopped that; this government, after 14 years, has not reinstated that commitment.

The New Democrats' plan for transit: In the future, when we become government next year, our plan is to make sure that transit funding is included at 50% of operating costs, something that is entirely absent from this budget.

What's clear, Speaker, is that, in this budget, any Ontarian that's waiting for a \$15 minimum wage is going to have to wait for a change in government. The 85% of Ontarians who want a public hydro system that will lower bills and keep them down are going to have to wait for a change in government. Ontarians who are ready to get into the housing market but need a government that takes housing affordability seriously are going to have to wait for a change in government. The one in three working Ontarians who don't have any prescription drug coverage at all are going to have to wait for a change in government in order to get the medications that they need without having to empty their bank accounts.

What's clear from this budget, Speaker, is that this Premier and this entire government just doesn't get it. They don't get where people are at, and they don't seem to care about it, Speaker.

La première ministre ne comprend pas les besoins des Ontariennes et des Ontariens.

And Ontarians who want a Premier who understands what they're going through? Well, they're just going to have to wait for a change in 2018, when the NDP forms a government in the province of Ontario.

Merci beaucoup. Thank you very much. Meegwetch.

1720

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I'm delighted to have the opportunity to share my thoughts this afternoon. I will be sharing my time with my colleagues the member from Etobicoke North, the member from Northumberland—Quinte West and also the Minister of Education.

I'm absolutely thrilled, as I just said a second ago, to have an opportunity to stand in my place this afternoon in the chamber and to participate in the proceedings to talk a little bit about Ontario budget 2017, a budget that every person in Ontario—every responsible and reasonable person in Ontario—understands as a landmark document, literally a document that will help move the province forward not only for the next twelve months, but certainly for another generation.

There is so much that the Minister of Finance and the Premier of Ontario and the rest of the government caucus have included in budget 2017 that deserves not only praise and acknowledgement, but also should provide a great deal of encouragement to people living in every single one of the 444 incredible communities that we have here in the province of Ontario.

Of course, as the Minister of Transportation, in particular, I am proud and delighted because there are additional monies provided for in budget 2017 to support the continued and sustained rollout or investments that we have been making with respect to transportation infrastructure—I'm going to get to those in just a quick second.

I have to tell you, Speaker, I did have an opportunity this afternoon to listen to the leader of the third party, the leader of the NDP. While I know this is not necessarily a questions-and-comments section this afternoon—this is me providing my thoughts on the budget. Again, many times I've stood in my place in this chamber over the last four and a half years and I've listened to that particular leader, the leader of the third party, and members of her caucus speak out on a wide variety of issues but never—and there was once a term that I used in this Legislature when I referenced their contribution to debates. I talked about the “convenient mythology” of Ontario's NDP. Today, perhaps, they reached a new level. The leader of the third party reached a new level with respect to the propagation of that particular mythology.

When you think about how much we have invested to support public transit in the city of Toronto and every other community around Toronto, all of the 905 communities, and when you consider how much we've invested literally in that leader's own hometown of Hamilton and how much we're currently investing in public transit, to suggest in this chamber or outside this chamber that somehow we are not making the investments we are, that we are not providing for these particular transportation achievements or outcomes, is simply, again, part of that larger convenient mythology that has been espoused by this leader and the Ontario NDP for a number of months, if not years—

Mr. Paul Miller: Ongoing maintenance.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: And I can hear the member specifically from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek—I believe it's him. I will only say that when there are 99 communities across the province of Ontario that have transit systems that are eligible for provincial gas tax money, and that the leader of the NDP and the NDP are only talking about providing ongoing operation support to one of the 99—the only one that they really come out to talk about is the city of Toronto. While I understand that they're a little bit late to the parade, a little bit late to the party, with respect specifically to supporting transit, if you live in Mississauga—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I apologize.

The Minister of Transportation has the floor now, which means he has the opportunity to speak, and I need to be able to hear him.

Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, if you live in Mississauga, if you live in York region, my home region, if you live in Durham, if you live in Hamilton—

Hon. Liz Sandals: If you live in Guelph.

Hon. Steven Del Duca:—if you live in Guelph, and you are a commuter and you're someone who relies on public transit—at the end of the day, the NDP's plan to support ongoing operating in one municipality, the city of Toronto, does nothing for the other communities that I just referenced.

It also ignores the fact that a number of weeks ago, we were in a position to announce that starting in 2019, flowing up till 2021 and then beyond every year, Kathleen Wynne and the Ontario Liberal government are investing double the amount that we are providing to all of these municipalities, including Toronto, through the gas tax program. That means an additional \$170 million a year, each and every year, for the city of Toronto, and an additional \$335 million province-wide for those 99 communities that I referenced a second ago, including Hamilton, including Windsor, including Niagara Falls and including communities in northern Ontario. That's not convenient mythology—that's what they espouse on that side of the House. That is actually tangible proof that we are moving the province forward and that we're making critical investments. And that's just in transit. I could talk about transportation. I could talk about the highway projects, the support for Connecting Links, the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund and so much additional work that we are doing to help make sure the yardsticks continue to move forward.

Do you know what's interesting? I will say that members of the Conservative Party, but also the NDP, every single time that we've heard them stand in their place over the last couple of weeks to talk about the budget, are—and look, I've said this many times in the House. I'm very respectful of the role of our opposition parties. I love the cut and thrust that is produced here in this chamber. It is essentially what helps us produce the best outcomes possible. But, Speaker, literally every single time I hear a member of the opposition stand up and talk about the budget at a global level, they have nothing but criticism. And then they come to talk to us privately or they stand up and ask a question when it relates to their community. They don't want us to do the big things; they just want us to do the selective little things that will help them in their ridings. I find that dichotomy, that difference in approach, to be, again, a little bit more than unfortunate. It just shows you sometimes that it's not about the big picture for both of the opposition parties.

Having said that, I know my colleagues will want to provide their comments on the budget.

I will say, a budget that is balanced, a budget that continues to show we're making the right investments at the right time and in the right places, is exactly the plan that we need to move this province forward. I hope those members on the other side will see the light, do the right thing and support budget 2017.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I recognize the member for Etobicoke North.

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: At the outset, of course, it is our duty and responsibility, pleasure and privilege to speak

about budget 2017. And I think, Speaker, that not only truthfully, but also intensely and with a great amount of support, we can see what's going to be happening because of this budget in so many different domains, whether we're talking health care, education, transportation, infrastructure—really, the future of Ontario.

I'll speak for a moment, with your permission, Speaker, with perhaps a focus right in on my own riding to see how elements of this budget literally and forcefully uplift so many different aspects of my community: my roadways, my transport system, educational institutions, the electricity side and, of course, post-secondary education.

As an example, I would like to commend not only Premier Wynne but the President of Treasury Board and our Deputy Premier and the Minister of Health for making what is a generational contribution to health care with OHIP+ and pharmacare.

I'd like to remind colleagues who are in this House—who, yes, are speaking so intensely about the various aspects of this bill—that we just had President Donald Trump and his colleagues and cohorts remove from the health care budget of the United States of America \$880 billion. From what I understand, it's mostly a tax giveaway to the rich. This will have practical implications. As an example, if you suffer from ongoing asthma, meaning requiring frequent medications and occasional trips to the emergency department and so on, this will add to your family budget something on the order of US\$4,000.

All of these types of issues and potential perils are not before the Canadian health care system, and are being even lessened by moves such as our OHIP+ and pharmacare.

Of the 200,000 students that we estimate will benefit from our free tuition—and once again, to remind our colleagues and folks who are listening, through you, Speaker, for families that are of modest income, making approximately \$50,000 or less annually, tuition for both college and university to their eligible children is free. A glass of milk isn't free in this country, but we're ready to offer free tuition and free college. We estimate that something on the order of about 200,000-plus students—and of course, in turn, their families—will benefit. That is a generational landscape change that will really fortify Ontario and Ontarians in Canada, in this knowledge-based economy.

We've already announced—it is, I think, now a week that it's happening—as of May 1, 2017, a full 25% reduction of hydro fees: something, yes, that is an issue, but ultimately it is our responsibility as stewards of the electricity system to not only foster proper generation but also distribution, and also, of course, to keep the lights on, the heat on, the AC on and so on. That's what we're attempting to do—and, I have to say, Speaker, after many, many years of neglect, as you will know.

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Humber College is the beneficiary of approximately \$90 million of largesse, for not only their faculty but also the student centre as well as courses. For example, not

too long ago we were there to help inaugurate and welcome even more offerings from their advanced skills and training development centre. It's really quite a jewel in the crown of Etobicoke North.

I would also like to commend the Minister of Transportation, the Honourable Steven Del Duca, MPP for Vaughan, not only for edifying Mayor John Tory recently during a fact-finding and fact-sharing mission to city hall, but also for the \$1-billion commitment just to my riding alone of the Finch light rail transit, the Finch LRT, leading to eight stops in my own riding. They are Humber College, Highway 27, Westmore, Martin Grove, Albion, Stevenson, Kipling and Islington. Speaker, I'm asking for an opening ceremony at each and every one of those stations, so I look forward to that.

Lastly: the \$400 million that is coming to Etobicoke General Hospital for a new emergency room, quadrupling its footprint, a new cardiorespiratory and neuro-diagnostic unit and so much more.

Speaker, I would share the desire of all parties here to, yes, move Ontario forward, but I would respectfully suggest that the anger and the venom that you're actually directing to us probably ought to be directed south of the border to Trump and his crew and what they're doing.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Northumberland—Quinte West.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: It gives me great pleasure to add a few minutes to this debate. First of all, let me say that we keep forgetting one of the most important planks in the budget: that it's balanced, and it's balanced for the next couple of years.

I just want to talk for a minute about OHIP+, and I'm going to relate that to personal experiences. One of my grandsons, who is 14 years old—his best friend has got type 1 diabetes. About a year ago, his younger sister, who's probably around 12 years old—it was identified that she also had type 1 diabetes. I would say that, speaking to the family—or my daughter-in-law speaking to the family—they were overjoyed to hear that, come January 1, 2018, a big burden on their shoulders is going to be removed.

I want to focus a little bit on health care in the last few minutes. The piece about OHIP+ has been very well received, but also hospitals—just on Friday, I was announcing additional base funding to the three hospitals in my riding. Let me just quote the chair of Northumberland Hills Hospital, Jack Russell. I believe this was in the Northumberland Today newspaper:

“The important thing to remember, NHH board chair Jack Russell said, is that this is not a one-time dollars announcement.

“It's base funding we can count on for this year's budget and next year's budget and the next year's budget.”

So they recognize that that's a need.

Even Quinte Health Care, which has four hospitals—one of them is in Trenton, in my riding. This was the Friday after the budget, April 28, from the Belleville Intelligencer: “Vice-president and chief financial officer

Brad Harrington ... said the Ontario budget unveiled a day earlier 'is a very good budget for the system as a whole, and the government is listening specifically to the hospital sector.'"

And he doesn't finish there. He goes on to say, "I don't think there's anything disappointing" in this budget. He's saying that what he's reading in the budget is factual.

Then it goes on to say: "Critics have said the Liberal government is now making election-friendly decisions which are simply fixing problems created by the government and the party's preceding government.

"But McGregor said the budget's approach to hospitals appears to be different because it is 'targeting legitimate pressure points.

"I don't think it's a case of correcting for mistakes so much as being on top of the issues that are out there" today.

Of course, he "expressed relief at Ontario's extension of its transformation fund for smaller hospitals. In the past, it's been used for technological upgrades and other improvements."

"For a system like QHC, where we have small hospitals ... it's absolutely critical that we get that funding, so we're very, pleased."

This is not what we're saying; this is what some of the folks in the health field have said.

I would just hope that the members opposite, both the official opposition and third party, focus on the parts that are important to Ontarians. Don't make up scripts or pretend that that's what it says—on facts—just like Mr. Harrington, chief financial officer, Quinte Health Care, mentioned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Education.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Speaker, I am very proud to rise in the House today to talk about budget measures 2017, a Stronger, Healthier Ontario. Nothing speaks more to the health of our province than when we look at education. We have invested in our education system consistently over the years, and it is paying off.

I was very pleased today to announce that our graduation rates have reached 86.5%. That is one point more than it was last year. That equates to 217,500 more graduates who are graduating than had the rate stayed as it was in 2004.

More young people are ensuring that they have a path to life and to success and moving forward. That's because of the investments that we're making in programs that support young people so that they can get the best education possible.

When we talk about our balanced budget, we are not sacrificing those investments in education, in health care, in the things that matter most to the people of Ontario. We are ensuring that we're making the right investments so that people can get the care that they need when they need it and where they need it.

I'm very proud to represent my riding of Scarborough-Guildwood. When I look at the investments that

we're making—and this is Nursing Week, so this is an opportunity to really celebrate all of those health care providers who are doing an excellent job across our province. We know that we have over 28,000 more nurses who are working in the system, and that is to be applauded.

Mr. Speaker, in this budget, we are reducing wait times. That is for key services like foot, knee, hip, cataracts, and the things that people really need. There is \$890 million in this budget, over three years, to address that. But there's also reducing wait times for specialized care, and there's an additional \$245 million.

I want to talk about how we're expanding home and community care. I'm very proud of this because I see a consistent investment in the people who are providing these very important services to people in need: personal support workers, home nursing and physiotherapy. Those are the things that our seniors require, and people who need specialized care in our communities, like in my riding of Scarborough-Guildwood. Some \$85 million is set aside in this budget to expand home and community care.

In addition to that, there's \$74 million for mental health supports. We know how critical that is, that we're providing this level of support to people who need it in the community.

What I am very proud of in this budget is that we are making investments, but these investments are really ensuring that Ontario's economy and our community continue to thrive. The minister responsible for economic development and growth announced last Friday that Ontario's unemployment rate has hit 5.8%, Mr. Speaker. That is remarkable, because it's showing that the investments that we're making in the skills and the talents of our people through our education system, innovative programs that are much needed like the new OSAP that's ensuring that people don't see barriers to post-secondary education—those are paying off.

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When we invest in our earliest learners, like our investments in child care, we are ensuring that our economy will remain strong for the future, because we're building that confidence right across our economy.

I just want to say to the parties opposite, there is not a lot to disagree with in this budget, because this budget is about investments in the people of Ontario. When you look at pharmacare and the fact that Ontario's government is leading this nation in the expansion of universal pharmacare to everyone under the age of 25, that is an important start towards the future of universal care.

Mr. Speaker, I support budget measures 2017, and I would encourage the parties opposite to do the same.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Windsor-Tecumseh has informed me that we have a special guest with us in the chamber this afternoon: the member of Parliament for Essex, Tracey Ramsey. Welcome to the Ontario Legislature.

Questions and comments?

Mr. Bill Walker: It's a pleasure again to rise and speak to the budget bill, the motion today.

I want to point out that the Deputy Premier earlier mentioned that I was talking about a have-not province. In the budget, on page 239, it shows that equalization payments from the federal government are \$1.424 billion, so she can spin it however she wants, as a have or have-not, but that's money where they are saying, "Give us more money. Give us more money because we do not know how to manage ours here." She can spin whatever numbers she wants, like they do with most.

It's like in here they haven't talked about hydro and the \$25 billion it's going to cost these young people, because all they did was move it out 10 years. We want to talk, Mr. Speaker, about—

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Point of order, the Deputy Premier.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, the member opposite has suggested that I misled the House. I would ask him that when he talks about net equalization, he talks about contribution as well as how much we receive. There is no question, Speaker, that we contribute—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. I don't find that there is a valid point of order.

The member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

Mr. Bill Walker: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. She ate up a whole bunch of my clock.

You can spin whatever shell you want. The people of Ontario have caught on to you. You can keep doing this all you want. The reality is, you're getting \$1.4 billion from the federal government.

For many years, we never, ever accepted any money—didn't have to accept it, Mr. Speaker. At the end of the day, they can spin numbers all they wish, but they are running deficits. They're spending \$12 billion—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I see there's a point of disagreement, but the reality is that the member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound has the opportunity to respond to the government members who spoke, who made their presentations. He would have had two minutes.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'll wait a second until the House comes to order.

The member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound can finish his reply.

Mr. Bill Walker: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. At the end of the day, again, they've had more revenues than ever come in and they still overspent, so that's a net loss as well. They can spin numbers all they want. The truth will come out in the end. They're spending way more every year than they bring in. They have doubled the debt to \$312 billion. We're spending \$12 billion in interest payments that do nothing for anyone in this great province. It's unacceptable.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always an honour to speak in the House. I'd like to reply to some of the Liberal members on their remarks.

But first, I would like to bring to the attention one of the heckles during my leader's remarks. As she was talking about social housing and the problems in social housing in Toronto, the member from Beaches–East York yelled across the floor, "I guess Toronto is a lousy landlord." I would just like to put that on the record.

But my main comments are regarding what the Minister of Transportation said about how members of the opposition criticize what the government does and then we go talk to the ministers. I'd like to say, that's our job. I often go and advocate on behalf of my constituents, on behalf of municipalities, and I work closely with the Minister of Transportation and with his staff. Often, when we work with the ministers and the ministries, we actually end up saving the government money, because it's our job, on all sides of the House, to identify issues in our area. When constituents come to us, it's our job to identify those issues and try to get them fixed before they come to the House. There are all kinds of issues, whether they're with roads or with—you know? So it's our job. It's our job to criticize. It's the government's job to put their best foot forward and it's our job to say, "Well, wait a second. You're making a mistake here."

There are some good things in the budget; a broken clock is right twice a day. But there are also some huge problems, and it's our job to point those huge problems out.

I'd just like to say that social housing is a huge issue in Toronto, but it's a huge issue across the province, including rural Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Yvan Baker: I'm pleased to engage in this debate on the budget motion.

The member from the PC caucus said things that I actually can't believe he believes. He said that he doesn't think this budget is doing anything for the people of Ontario just now. I'm sure he doesn't mean that. There are a lot of things in this budget for the people of Ontario, whether it be—

Interjection.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Look, there are investments in health care, there are investments in education, there are measures to address housing affordability, there's the OHIP+ program—I could go on and on. There are a tremendous number of measures here that help the people of Ontario.

The second thing I would say is that the member opposite—and he's not the only one from the PC caucus; I'm not going to single him out; he's one of them—keeps talking about how the budget isn't balanced. He keeps talking about how the budget isn't balanced. As someone who spent my career advising companies on how to manage their money and invest and grow their businesses, I know a thing or two about accounting. I know a thing or two about economics and finance. This is a balanced

budget. It's absolutely balanced. In fact, it's balanced this year, and it's going to be balanced next year and the year after.

I'm going to say it again: I'm not going to take lessons from members of that caucus who stand up and on the one hand ran on firing 100,000 people—many of whom were part of a Mike Harris government that slashed and burned. In fact, they did all that and they still couldn't get to a balanced budget because they cut taxes so much. They had to sell the 407 to make it work. Now they're coming around and saying, "Oh, you know what? We want you to pay down the debt. We want you to reduce interest payments. We want you to do all that stuff, and on the other hand we need you to spend more money on health care, more money on education in my riding and everything else."

I want to know who the real PC Party is. Will the real PC Party please stand up and make itself known? Because on the one hand, it's standing up and talking about, "We want to spend, spend, spend," and on the other hand, they're saying, "No, you've got to pay down the debt and the interest." You can't have it both ways. You can't have your cake and eat it too.

Will the real PC Party please stand up? The people on this side are standing up for the people of Ontario. It's about time you did as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I wish to remind the members that we are doing questions and comments in response and related to the presentations of the Minister of Transportation, the member for Etobicoke North, the member for Northumberland—Quinte West and the Minister of Education.

We have time for one last question or comment.

Mr. Randy Hillier: My comments are these: During the exchange, I was quite disappointed to hear the Deputy Premier suggest that the funding for the new Markdale hospital is in jeopardy, in response to the member from Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound. That's an astonishing intimidation, that the Deputy Premier would threaten the health care of constituents in Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound over a debate in this House. That is not what we expect during debate.

But if I may also address the member from Etobicoke who just commented about the actual balancing of the budget or not, I might refer him to look at the Auditor General's report. The Auditor General has reported that there's \$1.5 billion in pension liabilities that the government is inappropriately counting as an asset. So if we look at the Auditor General's report, indeed, this budget is not in balance; it's not in balance if the Auditor General's statements are accepted. The problem is, this Liberal government will not accept the Auditor General's reports.

I will make one last comment about the education minister's comments, where she stated the huge investments in education. We all know hundreds of schools are being closed in rural and small-town Ontario. Whatever investments she may be talking about, it is leading to the

closure of hundreds of primary and secondary schools in rural and small-town Ontario—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you. One of the government members can now reply.

I recognize the member for Northumberland—Quinte West.

1750

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I would like to thank the members for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, Timiskaming—Cochrane, Etobicoke Centre, Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington—I got it. I think I got it.

Mr. Randy Hillier: You got it, Lou.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Thank you. Speaker, I was trying to listen and I took your advice to try to respond to the comments made from the government side. I'm not sure that it worked out. Allow me some leeway, Speaker.

They talk about "the budget is not balanced." Well, I remember being here, elected in 2003, Speaker. It was a balanced budget that Ernie Eves put on the floor, the then Premier. But Speaker, the Auditor General found a \$5.6-billion hole. You were here, Speaker. You know that. So it's really hilarious to hear that.

Then, Speaker, they say we sold assets. They forgot about the giveaway of the 407—the 407, Speaker.

Let me talk about how they plan to balance the budget, as I anticipate, because they've been very, very quiet—the official opposition—on what their plan is. Is it going to be another 100,000 jobs?

Speaker, let me tell you what happened in my riding of Northumberland—Quinte West in 2014. The then member and candidate suggested that in order for them to balance the budget, they were going to look at a four-day school week—a four-day school week. I hope, for your sake, Speaker, that you folks don't go down the same road, because people in Ontario didn't accept it. I'm only trying to help. But a four-day school week, Speaker?

I would hope that you see the light and support our budget.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. We have less than 10 minutes to go, I would remind the members. Further debate?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I'll bring it home for the last few minutes, Speaker. Thank you very much. We've heard a lot of bantering on both sides, but what I really want to talk about here are some of the longer-term effects of some of the decisions that this government has made. I know they talked about the unemployment rate and where it is today, but let me talk about the reality: the labour market participation rate.

In the labour market participation rate—that means how many people in your city, your community, are actually working. Let me tell you, in Nipissing, my riding, and specifically in North Bay, the labour market participation rate last year in February was 65%. That meant 65% of the people in the city were working and 35% were not, for whatever reason—they may have retired or they may have just given up looking for work. All of these things, Speaker, are what make a labour market participation rate.

Well, we were shocked at home last week when the current labour market participation rate came out. Speaker, it has tumbled from 65% last year to 50%. That's the reality. This is not a partisan statement. It's not a political statement. It is the reality of the men and women in the city and in the region of Nipissing. Only 50% of the people in my community are working. The other 50% have either retired or given up looking for work. That's the reality. That's where we are.

Interjections.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: They don't like that. They moan.

That is a statistic. That is people. These are faces that come into our office looking for help. These are real people, with real names.

I've told the story recently about one fellow who came into the office. He had his energy cut off and, as a result, his pipes froze. Water spread everywhere. Speaker, he shovelled snow every night from his yard into his bathtub so he could have a bath at night.

That's the people who come into my office in the constituency when I'm home and meet with me. These are real stories about real people, and that's a direct result when you have a labour market participation rate of 50%.

You can talk all you want and moan and groan, but the reality is that people are struggling, especially people in the north.

Speaker, I have an amendment. I move that the motion moved by the Minister of Finance on April 27, 2017, "that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government," be amended by deleting the words following "that this House" and adding thereto the following: "recognizes that Ontario has not balanced the budget and in fact contains a \$5-billion operational deficit financed through one-time revenue sources and cash grabs, and \$10 billion in new debt, and therefore the government has lost the confidence of this House."

I give this to page Eesha.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Mr. Fedeli has moved that the motion moved by the Minister of Finance on April 27, 2017, "that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government," be amended by deleting the words following "that this House" and adding thereto the following: "recognizes that Ontario has not balanced the budget and in fact contains a \$5-billion operational deficit financed through

one-time revenue sources and cash grabs, and \$10 billion in new debt, and therefore the government has lost the confidence of this House."

The member for Nipissing continues to have the floor for three more minutes.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Speaker, to this amendment specifically, it brings up three points. It says that there is a \$5-billion operational deficit, a \$5-billion hole in the budget, and that is primarily due to receiving one-time revenues such as the sale of Hydro One, such as the monies from cap-and-trade, which have both been put right into the direct revenues of the government. This includes the sale of the LCBO headquarters. It includes the sale of the OPG headquarters. Next year, it's going to include—we just heard the Premier talk about the money that will be coming in; she did a presser this afternoon—\$2.8 billion coming in from the next tranche, the final tranche, of the sale of Hydro One. This will be the Lakeview property; this will be the Seaton lands.

It's all one-time revenue, Speaker. That's why we say there's a hole in the budget. The Auditor General also says there's a hole in the budget because this government has used the one-time pension funds. Many of us were around when the pension funds were underwater. Today they happen to be flush. That's why. It's so large a number now that it has become material. It's a big enough number to actually put where it belongs. When it was a small number or an insignificant amount, it didn't matter that it was or wasn't included. This is the auditor's explanation.

Speaker, they talk about a balanced budget, but a balanced budget would mean that you take in money and you pay out money that would be either the same—certainly not pay out more. There's a \$10-billion amount of money that's being added to the debt this year. That's why we put in this reasonable and reasoned amendment, because there's new debt. The only way they can artificially balance the budget is by the use of one-time revenue. I find that to be purposely done to the people of Ontario, and I also find that unacceptable.

Debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. It being 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1800.

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